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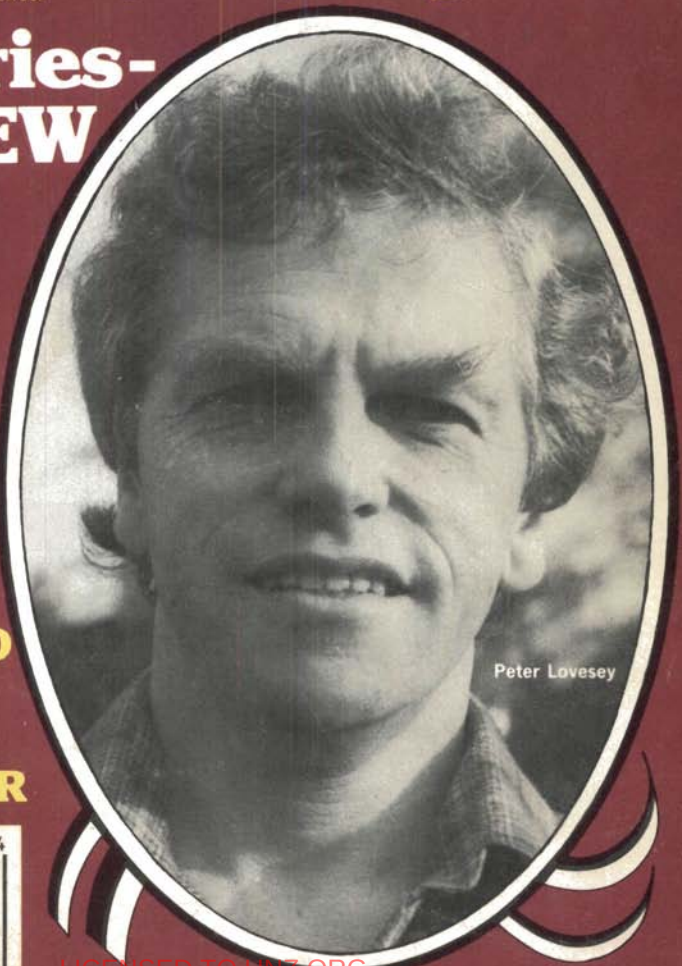

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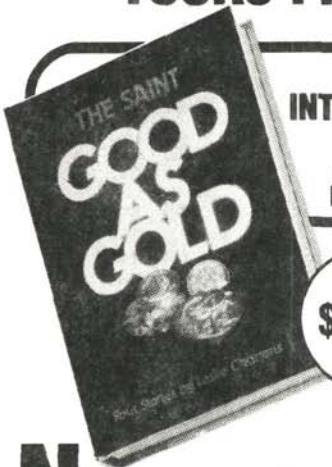

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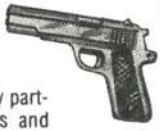

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a *NEW* short story by

RUTH RENDELL

Let us quote from Ruth Rendell's newest story: "It troubled Alice that her latent sadism, which she recognized for what it was, should be titillated" by hearing about new murder methods.

Does that pique your curiosity?

A NEEDLE FOR THE DEVIL

by RUTH RENDELL

The devil finds work for idle hands to do, as Mrs. Gibson used to say to her daughter, and Alice had found that in her case the devil (or her own mysterious inner compulsions) led her to violence. As a child she would strike people who annoyed her and when she was 14 she attacked her sister with a knife, though no harm was done. But if her hands itched to injure, they were also gifted hands and as she was taught to occupy them with handicrafts, the impulse to violence grew less. Or was sublimated, as she learned to say when she began training to be a nurse.

Only her mother had opposed Alice's choice of a career. Perhaps it was only her mother who understood her. But her objections were overruled by Alice's father, by her headmistress, by the school careers officer, and by Alice herself. And certainly Alice did well. There were no unfortunate incidents of the kind Mrs. Gibson had feared.

Naturally, in her new life, she had had to abandon her handicrafts. One cannot keep a loom or a potter's wheel in one's room in the nurses' residence. And there were many occasions when Alice would come off duty worn out, not so much from lifting patients, making beds, and running to and fro, as from the exercise of an iron self-control. The impulse to hit, slap, or otherwise manhandle a patient

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who had angered her had to be constantly suppressed.

Then the girl who shared her room came back from two days off duty wearing a knee-length white wool coat.

"I love your coat," said Alice. "It's gorgeous. It must have cost the earth."

"I made it," said Pamela.

"You *made* it? You mean you knitted it?"

"It wasn't very difficult and it only took three weeks."

Alice had never thought of knitting. To Alice, knitting was something one's grandmother did or one's aunts or pregnant women making layettes. But if Pamela could make that coat, which neither savored of aunts nor was layette-like, she was very sure she could. And it might solve that problem of hers which had lately become so pressing that she was afraid she might have to leave without finishing her training.

Knitting has the advantage over sewing or weaving in that it requires basically only a ball of wool and a pair of needles. It can be done in one's lunch break, in a train, during night duty. It calms the nerves, occupies the hands, provides therapy—and supplies a wardrobe. Alice began knitting with enthusiasm and found that, because of the way it can be taken up at any free moment, it answered her purpose better than any of her other crafts had.

She progressed in her chosen career, became a staff nurse, a sister, and by the time she was 30 had full charge of the men's medical ward in St. Gregory's Hospital for Officers. It was there, some three years later, that she first set eyes on Rupert Clarigate who had been brought in after suffering a mild heart attack.

Rupert Clarigate was 52 at the time of his coronary. He was a bachelor who had retired from the army two years before with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel and had since been living very comfortably—too comfortably perhaps—on his handsome pension. Had he smoked less and walked more, eaten less lavishly of roast pheasant at his club and drunk less special old Napoleon brandy afterward, he might not, according to his doctor, have been seized one Saturday night by a fierce pain down his left arm and up his left side and found himself a moment later lying on the floor, fighting for breath.

His doctor was one of those who believe that a coronary patient should never be left unattended for the first days after an attack. Hence, St. Gregory's and Sister Gibson. On his first morning he

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awoke to look into the sea-blue eyes of a slim young woman in a trim uniform and with her blonde hair half covered by a starched white coif.

"Good morning, Colonel Clarigate," said Alice. "My goodness, but aren't you looking better this morning! It just shows what a good night's sleep can do."

Alice said this sort of thing to all her new patients but Rupert, who had never been in a hospital before and had in fact been riotously healthy all his life till now, thought it was specially designed for him and that her tone was exceptionally sweet. He did not hear her, five minutes later, telling one of her students who had dropped a kidney dish that she was not only hopelessly unfitted to be a nurse but mentally retarded as well, because this diatribe was delivered in the cleansing department off the ward known as the sluice. He thought Alice must have a delightful disposition, always cheerful, always encouraging, endlessly patient, as well as being the sort of girl who looked as if she knew how to have a good time.

"Who's the lucky chap that's taking you out tonight, Sister?" Rupert said as Alice put her head round the door before going off duty. "I envy him, I don't mind telling you."

"No chap, Colonel," said Alice. "I'm going to have a quiet evening doing my knitting in front of the TV."

Those statements were quite true. There was no chap. There had been in days gone by—several, in fact, including one whom Alice would probably have married had she not once slapped his face (and thereby dislodged a filling from a molar) for teasing her. But she had been very young then and without her prop and resort. Since those days she had put her career before a possible husband and had become so used to the overtures and the flirtatious remarks of patients that she hardly took in what they said and scarcely thought of them as men.

Rupert Clarigate, however, was different. He was one of the handsomest men she had ever seen and he had such a wonderful head of hair. For although his face was still youthful and unlined, his hair was snow-white—white and thick and ever so slightly wavy; and since he had left the army it had been allowed to grow just long enough to cover the tops of his ears. It was the first thing Alice had noticed about him. She had always felt a peculiar antipathy to baldness, and though accustomed to the most repulsive sights and to washing a wound or cleaning an abscess without a flicker of distaste, it was still as much as she could do to wash a man's bald pate or

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comb the hair which surrounded it. Rupert Clarigate looked as if he would never be bald, for not even a coin-sized bare spot showed amid the lush snowy mass.

Besides that, she liked his hearty jovial manner, the public-school accent, the Sandhurst voice. The slightly lecherous admiration in his eyes, kept well under control, excited her. By the end of the first week of his stay she was in love, or would have said she was in love, having no criterion to judge by.

As for Colonel Clarigate, he had always intended to get married one day. A long-standing affair with another officer's wife had kept him single till he was 35, and after that was over he felt too set in his ways to embark on matrimony. Too selfish, the other officer's wife said. And it was true that Rupert could see no point in having a wife when he didn't want to stay in evenings, had no desire for children, disliked the idea of sharing his income, and in any case had his officer's servant to wait on him and clean his quarters.

But he would marry one day—when he retired. Now retirement had come and he was living in the big inconvenient old house his parents had left him. There was no one to keep it clean. He ate rich food in expensive restaurants because there was no one at home to cook for him and he told himself he smoked too much because he was lonely. In fact, he had had his heart attack because he had no wife. Why should not pretty, efficient, kindly Sister Gibson be his wife?

Why not retire from nursing? thought Alice. Why should she not marry Colonel Clarigate and have a home of her own instead of a two-room flat that went with the job? Besides, she was in love with him and he had such beautiful thick hair. He must be in love with Sister Gibson, thought Rupert, otherwise he would surely not feel so uneasy about her in the evenings when he was certain she must be out with some chap. This, he knew from his experience with the other officer's wife, was jealousy and a proof of love.

He left the hospital after three weeks and went to convalesce in the country. From there he wrote to Alice nearly every day. When he came home again he took her to the theater to see a slapstick sexy comedy at which they both laughed very much, and then to the cinema to see a reissue of *Carry On, Nurse* which had them equally convulsed. On their third evening out together they became engaged.

"People may say it was sudden," said Alice, "but I feel we know each other through and through. After all there's no more intimate

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situation, is there, than that of nurse and patient?"

"I can think of one," said Rupert with a wink, and they both fell to laughing.

His fifty-third birthday occurred about a month after their engagement and Alice knitted him a pullover. It was rust-red, bordered at the welt and on the neckline with fine stripes of cream and dark green, and it suited him well, for Rupert, in spite of his high living, had never become fat. Alice insisted on looking after him. She took him out for sensible walks and gently discouraged him from smoking.

The Clarigate house was not to her taste, so he set about selling it and buying another. The prospect of furnishing a new house which was in a seaside resort on the south coast—they could live anywhere they chose, Rupert said, there was no need to stay in London—filled Alice with excited anticipation, especially as Rupert was giving her a free hand with his savings.

The marriage took place in May, three months after their first meeting.

It was a quiet wedding, followed by a small luncheon party. Mrs. Gibson, now a widow, was present and so was Alice's sister and that friend Pamela who had introduced her to the charms of knitting, and Pamela's husband Guy, a free-lance writer and author of mystery novels. On Rupert's side were a cousin and his former commanding officer and Dr. Nicholson, that conscientious medical man who had been responsible for sending him to St. Gregory's. The newly married couple left at three to catch the plane that was to take them to Barbados for their honeymoon.

Alice had never before been away on a holiday without taking her knitting with her. In Palma de Mallorca she had knitted a Fairisle cap and gloves for her niece, in Innsbrück she had begun an Aran for her brother-in-law, and in the Isles of Greece she had finished a slipover for herself. But some instinct as to the rightness or suitability of certain actions told her that one does not take knitting on one's honeymoon, and indeed she found there would scarcely have been the opportunity to knit. One can hardly knit on a beach and they were mostly on the beach when they were not dining and dancing, for Rupert had been right when he assessed his wife as a girl who knew how to have a good time.

Alice would have danced harder, eaten more heartily, and stayed up even later were it not for her prudent care of her husband's

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health. While Rupert, vigorous and virile as he was, might in some ways seem as young as she, there was no getting away from the fact that he had had one coronary and might have another. She was glad to see that he had given up smoking and if, toward the end of their stay, she noticed an edge to his temper, she put this down to the heat.

Furnishing the new house took up all her time once they returned. There were carpets to choose and order, plumbing and heating and electrical engineers to call, upholsterers and curtain makers to be urged on. Alice worked briskly, refusing to allow Rupert to help, but taking him out each evening with her for a therapeutic stroll along the sea front. He looked fitter than he had in all the five months she had known him and he could run upstairs now without shortness of breath.

It was on the morning after the day when the new carpets were fitted, after Alice had rearranged and polished the furniture, that she felt she could at last begin to relax. Rupert had gone to Dr. Nicholson's for his monthly checkup. She set out for the shopping center to buy herself some wool. On the previous evening, while they were out for their walk, Rupert had pointed out a man leaning over the sea wall who was wearing just the kind of sleeveless pullover he would fancy for himself. Alice had said nothing but had smiled and squeezed his arm.

During the years that had passed since Pamela walked in wearing that white coat, Alice had become an expert at her craft. She knew all there was to know about it. She understood the finer points of grafting, of invisible casting off, of the weaving in of contrasts. She knew every kind of yarn available from top heavyweight natural wool to two-ply cotton, and exactly which needles to use with each. Without reference to charts she could tell you that an English size-fourteen needle is equivalent to the European two-millimeter and the American double O. She could with ease adapt a pattern to a different size or, if necessary, work without a pattern at all. Once she had seen a jumper or cardigan she could copy it and turn out a precisely identical garment.

And besides all this, the whole area of knitting was an emotive one to her. She could not help regarding it as having been a life saver and therefore it had become far more to her than some other woman's embroidery or crochet work.

So it was natural that on entering a wool shop she should have a sensation of sick excitement as well as experiencing the deep

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pleasure felt, for example, by a scholar going into a library.

Woolcraft Limited she quickly judged a good shop of its kind and she spent a happy half hour inside before finally choosing a pattern for a sleeveless pullover and six twenty-five-gram balls of a fine saxe-blue wool and acrylic mixture.

There was no opportunity to begin knitting that day. Rupert must have his lunch and then there would be an afternoon's gardening for both of them and in the evening they were going to a dinner-dance in the Pump Room. But on the following afternoon, while Rupert was down the garden trimming the privet hedge, Alice drew out her first ball of blue wool and began.

On moving into the house, she had appropriated the large bottom drawer of a chest in their living room for her knitting materials. In it were all her many leftover balls of wool and ends of wool from a multiplicity of garments made over the years, her gauge, her tape measure, her bodkins for sewing up and her sewing-up skeins and, ranged in front, all her pairs of needles, a pair of every possible size and each pair in its long plastic envelope. Alice had selected a pair of number fourteens, the very finest size, for beginning on the welt of Rupert's pullover.

As she cast on the required number of 150 stitches and felt the familiar thin metal pins against her hands and the soft, faintly fluffy yarn slip rhythmically between her fingers, a great calm descended on Alice. It was like coming home after a long absence. It was like having a cigarette (she supposed) or a drink after a month's abstention. It was wonderful. It seemed to set the seal on her happiness. Here she was married, with a charming husband whom she loved, very well off, living in the home of her dreams, and now she was settled in her new life, once more taking up the hobby that afforded her so much pleasure.

She had knitted about half an inch, for the work was slow with such fine materials, when she heard Rupert come in from the garden and rinse his hands under the kitchen tap. Presently he walked into the room where she was. He stood a yard or two in from the doorway and stared at her.

"What are you doing, sweetie?"

"Knitting," said Alice, smiling at him.

Rupert came and sat opposite her. He was fascinated. He knew there was such a thing as hand-knitting, or that there used to be, for he seemed to remember his mother mentioning it about 40 years before, but he had never actually seen it being done. Alice's fingers

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flicked up and down, making precisely the same movement about a hundred times a minute. And they seemed to move independently of the rest of her, of her body which was gracefully relaxed, of her eyes which occasionally met his, and of her mind too, he suspected, which might be wandering off anywhere.

"I didn't know you knitted," he said after a while.

"Darling! Where do you think your red sweater came from? I told you I made it."

Rupert had not given much thought to the provenance of the red sweater. "I suppose I thought you must have done it on a machine."

Alice laughed heartily at this. She continued to knit. Rupert read the evening paper which had just been delivered. After a time he said, "Can I talk to you while you're doing that?"

He sounded so like a little boy whose mother cannot be bothered with him that Alice's heart was touched. "Darling, of course you can. Talk away! I'm a very practised knitter, you know. I can not only talk while I'm knitting, I can read, watch television—my goodness, I could knit in the dark!" And she fixed her eyes on him, smiling tenderly, while her fingers jerked up and down like pistons.

But Rupert didn't talk. He hardly said a word until they were out for their evening walk, and next day when she again took up the blue pullover she was once more conscious of his stare. After a while he lit a cigarette, his first for several weeks. Without a word he left the room and when she went into the kitchen to prepare their evening meal she found him sitting at the table, reading one of his favorite war memoirs.

It was not until Alice had had four sessions of work on the pullover and had completed six inches of the back, having changed by now to the slightly coarser needle, number twelve and made of red plastic, that Rupert made any further reference to her occupation.

"You know, sweetie," he said, "there's absolutely no reason why we shouldn't buy our clothes ready-made. We're not poor. I hope I haven't given you the impression that I'm a tight-fisted sort of chap. Any time you want the money to buy yourself a blouse or a dress or whatever that is, you've only to say the word."

"This isn't for me, Rupert, it's for you. You said you wanted a pullover like the one we saw on that man on the sea front."

"Did I? I suppose I must have if you say so, but I don't recall it. Anyway, I can pop down to the men's outfitters and buy one if I feel inclined, can't I, eh? There's no need for you to wear yourself out making something I can buy in ten minutes."

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"But I *like* knitting, darling. I love it. And I think home-knitted garments are much nicer than bought ones."

"Must make your fingers ache, I should think," said Rupert. "Talk about wearing one's fingers to the bone. I know the meaning of that phrase all right now, eh?"

"Don't be so silly," snapped Alice. "Of course it doesn't make my fingers ache. I enjoy it. And I think it's a great pity you've started smoking again."

Rupert smoked five cigarettes that day and ten the next and the day after that Pamela and Guy came to stay for a fortnight's holiday.

Rupert thought, and Alice agreed with him, that if you lived by the sea it was positively your duty to invite close friends for their summer holidays. Besides, Guy and Pamela, who hadn't a large income, had two children at expensive boarding schools and probably would otherwise have had no holiday at all. They arrived, while their children were away camping, for the middle two weeks of August.

Pamela had not knitted a row since her daughter was two but she liked to watch Alice at work. She said she found it soothing. And when she looked inside the knitting drawer in the chest and saw the leftover hanks of yarn in such delectable shades—pinks and lilacs and subtle greens and honey yellows and chocolate browns—she said it made her feel she must take it up again, for clothes cost so much and it would be a great saving.

Guy was not one of those writers who never speak of their work. He was always entertaining on the subject of the intricate and complex detective stories he yearly produced and would weave plots out of all kinds of common household incidents or create them from things he observed while they were out for a drive. Alice enjoyed hearing him evolve new murder methods and he played up to her with more and more ingenious and bizarre devices.

"Now take warfarin," he would say. "They use it to kill rats. It inhibits the clotting of the blood, so that when the rats fight among themselves and receive even a small wound they bleed to death. I understand they give it to human beings too."

"That's right," said Alice, the nurse. "It stops clots forming in people who've had a thrombosis."

"If I were going to use that method in a book I'd have the murderer give his victim warfarin plus a strong sedative. Then a small cut, say to the wrist—"

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Another time he was much intrigued by a book of Alice's on plants inadvisable for use in winemaking. Most illuminating for the thriller-writer, he said.

"It says here that the skunk cabbage, whatever that may be, *contains irritant crystals of calcium oxalate*. If you eat the stuff, the inside of your mouth swells up and you die because you can't breathe. Now your average pathologist might notice the swellings but I'd be willing to bet you anything he'd never suppose them the result of eating *lysichiton symplocarpus*. There's another undetectable murder method for you."

Alice was excited by his ingenuity and Pamela was used to it. Only Rupert, who had perhaps been nearer actual death than any of them, grew squeamish and was not sorry when the two weeks came to an end and Guy and Pamela were gone. Alice too felt a certain relief. It troubled her that her latent sadism, which she recognised for what it was, should be titillated by Guy's inventions. With thankfulness she returned to the gentle placebo of her knitting and took up the blue pullover again, all eight inches of it.

Rupert lit a cigarette.

"I say, I've been thinking, why don't I buy you a knitting machine?"

"I don't want a knitting machine, darling," said Alice.

"Had a look at one actually while I was out with old Guy one day. A bit pricey but I don't mind that, sweetie, if it makes you happy."

"I said I don't want a knitting machine. The point is that I like knitting by hand. I've already told you, it's my hobby, it's a great interest of mine. Why do I want a big cumbersone machine that takes up space and makes a noise when I've got my own two hands?"

He was silent. He watched her fingers working.

"As a matter of fact, it's the noise I don't like," he said.

"What noise?" said Alice, exasperated.

"That everlasting click-click-click."

"Oh, nonsense! You can't possibly hear anything right across the room."

"I can."

"You'll get used to it," said Alice.

But Rupert did not get used to it, and the next time Alice began her knitting he said, "It's not just the clicking, sweetie, it's the sight of your hands jerking about mechanically all the time. To be perfectly honest with you, it gets on my nerves."

"Don't look then."

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"I can't help it. There's an awful sort of fascination that draws my eyes."

Alice was beginning to feel nervous herself. A good deal of her pleasure was spoiled by those staring eyes and the knowledge of his dislike of what she did. It began to affect the texture of her work, making her take uneven stitches. She went on rather more slowly and after half an hour she let the nine-inch-long piece of blue fabric and the needles fall into her lap.

"Let's go out to dinner," said Rupert eagerly. "We'll go and have a couple of drinks down on the front and then we'll drive over to the Queen's for dinner."

"If you like," said Alice.

"And, sweetie, give up that silly old knitting, eh? For my sake? You wouldn't think twice about doing a little thing like that for me, would you?"

A little thing, he called it. Alice thought of it not twice but many times. She hardly thought of anything else and she lay awake for a large part of the night. But next day she did no knitting and she laid away what she had done in the drawer. Rupert was her husband, and marriage, as she had often heard people say, was a matter of give and take. This she would give to him, remembering all he had given her.

She missed her knitting bitterly. Those years of doing an active job, literally on her feet all day, and those leisure times during which her hands had always been occupied, had unfitted her for reading or listening to music or watching television. With idle hands, it was hard for her to keep still. Incessantly she fidgeted. And when Rupert, who had not once mentioned the sacrifice she had made for him, did at last refer to her knitting, she had an only just controllable urge to hit him.

They were passing, on an evening walk, that men's outfitters of which he had spoken when he first saw the beginnings of the ill-fated pullover, and there in the window was a heavyweight wool sweater in creamy white with an intricate Fairisle pattern in red and grey on it.

"Bet you couldn't do that, eh, sweetie? It takes a machine to make a garment like that. I call that a grand job."

Alice longed to slap his face. She not make that? Why, give her half a chance and she could make it in a week and turn out a far more beautiful piece of work than that object in the window! But her heart yearned after it, for all that. How easily, when she had

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been allowed to knit, could she have copied it! How marvelously would it have occupied her, working out those checks and chevrons on squared paper, weaving in the various threads with the yarn so skillfully hooked round three fingers! She turned away. Was she never to be allowed to knit again? Must she wait until Rupert died before she could take up her needles?

It began to seem to Alice a monstrous cruelty, this thing which her husband had done to her.

Why had she been so stupid as to marry someone she had known only three months? She thought she would enjoy punching him with her fists, pummeling his head, until he cried to her to stop and begged her to knit all she liked.

The change Rupert had noticed in his wife he did not attribute to the loss of her hobby. He had forgotten about her knitting. He thought she had become irritable and nervous because she was anxious about his smoking—after all, none knew better than she that he shouldn't smoke—and he made a determined effort, his second since his marriage, to give it up.

After five days of total abstention it seemed to him as if every fiber of his body cried out for, yearned for, put out straining anguished stalks for, a cigarette. It was worst of all in the pub on the sea front where the atmosphere was laden with cigarette smoke, and there, while Alice was sitting at their table, he surreptitiously bought a pack of 20 at the bar.

Back home, he took one out and lit it. His need for nicotine was so great that he had forgotten everything else. He had even forgotten Alice was sitting opposite him.

He took a wonderful long inhalation, the kind that makes the room rock and waves roar in one's head, a cool, aromatic, heady, glorious draw.

The next thing he knew the cigarette had been pulled out of his mouth and hurled into the fireplace and Alice was belaboring him with her fists while stamping on the remaining 19 cigarettes in the pack.

"You mean selfish cruel beast! You can keep on with your filthy evil-smelling addiction that makes me so sick to my stomach—you can keep that up, killing yourself, while I'm not allowed to do my poor harmless useful work. You selfish insensitive pig!"

It was their first quarrel and it went on for hours. Next morning Rupert went into town and bought 100 cigarettes and Alice locked

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herself in her bedroom and knitted. They were reconciled after two or three days. Rupert promised to undergo hypnosis for his smoking. Nothing was said at the time about Alice's knitting, but soon afterward she explained quite calmly and rationally to Rupert that she needed to knit for her "nerves" and would have to devote specific times to it, such as an hour every evening during which she would go and sit in their little-used dining room.

Rupert said he would miss her. He hadn't got married for his wife to be in one room and he in another. But all right, he hadn't much option, he supposed, so long as it was only an hour.

It began as an hour. Alice found she didn't miss Rupert's company. It seemed to her that they had said to each other all they had to say and all they ever would have. If there had been any excitement in her marriage, there was none left now. Knitting itself was more interesting, though when this garment was completed she would make no more for Rupert. Let him go to his men's outfitters if that was what he wanted. She thought she might make herself a burgundy wool suit. And as she envisaged it, longing to begin, the allotted hour lengthened into an hour and a half, into two.

She had almost completed the back of the pullover after two and a half hours of concentrated work, when Rupert burst into the room, a cigarette in his mouth and his breath smelling of whiskey. He snatched the knitting out of her hands and pulled it off the red plastic needles and snapped each needle in half.

Alice screamed at him and seized his collar and began shaking him, but Rupert tore the pattern across and unraveled stitches as fast as he could go. Alice struck him repeatedly across the face. He dodged and hit her such a blow that she fell to the floor, and then he pulled out every one of those two or three hundred rows of knitting until all that remained was a loose and tangled pile of crinkled blue yarn.

Three days later she told him she wanted a divorce. Rupert said she couldn't want one as much as he did. In that case, said Alice, perhaps he would like to pack his things and leave the house as soon as possible.

"Me? Leave this house? You must be joking."

"Indeed I'm not joking. That's what a decent man would do."

"What, just walk out of a house I bought with my inheritance from my parents? Walk out on the furniture you bought with my life savings? You're not only a hysterical bitch, you're out of your

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mind. *You* can go. I'll pay you maintenance—the law forces me to do that, though it'll be the minimum I can get away with, I promise you."

"And you call yourself an officer and a gentleman!" said Alice. "What am I supposed to do? Go back to nursing? Go back to a poky flat? I'd rather die. Certainly I'm staying in this house."

They argued about it bitterly day after day. Rupert's need overcame the hypnosis and he chain-smoked. Alice was now afraid to knit in his presence, for he was physically stronger than she, even if she had had the heart to start the blue pullover once again. And whom would she give it to? She would not get out of the house, *her* house which Rupert had given her and for which, in exchange, she had given him the most important thing she had.

"I gave up my knitting for you," she screamed at him, "and you can't even give me a house and a few sticks of furniture."

"You're mad," said Rupert. "You ought to be locked up."

Alice rushed at him and smacked his face. He caught her hands and threw her into a chair and slammed out of the room. He went down to the pub on the sea front and had two double whiskies and smoked half a pack of cigarettes. When he got back, Alice was in bed in the spare room. Just as he refused to leave the house, so Rupert had refused to get out of his own bedroom. He took two of Dr. Nicholson's sleeping tablets and went to bed.

In the morning Alice went into the room where Rupert was and washed his scalp and combed his beautiful thick white hair. She changed the pillowcases, wiped a spot off Rupert's pajama jacket, and then she phoned Dr. Nicholson to say Rupert was dead. He must have passed away in his sleep. She had awakened to find him dead beside her.

"His heart, of course," said Dr. Nicholson, and because Alice had been a nurse, "a massive myocardial infarction."

She nodded. "I suppose I should have expected it."

"Well, in these cases—"

"You never know, do you? I must be grateful for the few happy months we had together."

Dr. Nicholson signed the death certificate. There was no question of an autopsy. Pamela and Guy came to the cremation and took Alice back home with them for four weeks. When Alice left to return to the house that was now entirely hers, they promised to take her at her word and come to stay once again in the summer. Alice was

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very comfortably off, for by no means all Rupert's savings had been spent on the furniture, his life insurance had been considerable, and there was his army pension, reduced but still generous.

It was an amazingly young-looking Alice, her hair rinsed primrose, her figure the trimmest it had been in ten years, who met Guy and Pamela at the station. She was driving a new white Lancia coupé and wearing a smart knitted suit in a subtle shade of burgundy.

"I love your suit," said Pamela.

"I made it."

"I really must take up knitting again. I used to be so good at it, didn't I? And think of the money one saves."

On the following evening, a Sunday, after they had spent most of the day on the beach, Pamela again reverted to the subject of knitting and said her fingers itched to start on something straightaway. Alice looked thoughtful. Then she opened the bottom drawer of the chest and took out the saxe-blue wool.

"You could have this if you like, and this pattern. You could make it for Guy."

Pamela took the pattern which had apparently been torn in half and mended with sticking tape. She looked at the hanks of wool.

"Has some of it been used?"

"I didn't like what I'd done, so I undid it. The wool's been washed and carded to get the crinkles out."

"If you're thinking of making that for me," said Guy, "I'm all for it. Splendid idea."

"All right. Why not? Very fine needles it takes, doesn't it? Have you got a pair of fourteens, Alice?"

A shadow passed across Alice's face. She hesitated. Then she picked up the plastic envelopes one by one, but desultorily, until Pamela, fired now with enthusiasm, dropped on her knees beside her and began hunting through the drawer.

"Here we are. Number fourteen, two millimeters, U.S. double O . . . There's only one needle here, Alice."

"Sorry about that, it must be lost." Alice took the single needle from her almost roughly and made as if to close the drawer.

"No, wait a minute, it's bound to be loose in there somewhere."

"I'm sure it isn't, it's lost. You won't have time to start tonight, anyway."

Guy said, "I don't see how you could lose one knitting needle."

"In a train," said Pamela, peering into each needle packet. "It

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could fall down the side of the seat and before you could get it out you'd be at your station."

"Alice never goes in trains."

"I suppose you could use it to unblock a drainpipe?"

"You'd use a big fat one for that. Now if this situation happened in one of my books I'd have it that the needle was a murder weapon. Inserted into the scalp of a person who was, say, drugged or drunk, it would penetrate the covering of the brain and the brain itself, causing a subdural haemorrhage. You'd have to sharpen the point a bit, file it maybe, and then of course you'd throw it away afterwards. Hence, you see, only one number fourteen needle in the drawer."

"And immediately they examined the body they'd find out," said his wife.

"Well, you know, I don't think they would. Did you know that almost all men over middle age have enough signs of coronary disease for a pathologist, unless he was exceptionally thorough, to assume that as the cause of death? Of course your victim would have to have a good head of hair to cover up the mark of entry."

"For heaven's sake, let's change the subject," said Pamela, closing the drawer, for she had noticed that Alice, perhaps because of that tactless reference to coronaries, had gone very white and that the hands which held the wool were trembling.

But Alice managed a smile. "We'll buy you a pair of number fourteens tomorrow," she said, "and perhaps I'll start on something new as well. My mother always used to say that the devil finds work for idle hands to do."

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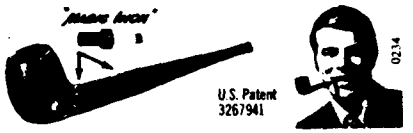

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Another of Mr. Adams' clever and subtle short-shorts . . .

THREE QUICK TRICKS

by T. M. ADAMS

The girl padded in from the terrace in a wet bathing suit and caught Andorn fiddling with the cards. "Stacking the deck?" she said, and yawned. Andorn looked up, apparently startled, and then relaxed. "Oh, hello, Jeannie. Where are your folks?"

" 'Folks?' " she said. "That's kind of hick, isn't it? Mark and Ava and your wife are in the boathouse." She poked around the room, looking to see if any of the uncleared glasses had liquor in them. She was 14 years old and had a deep moneyed tan. "You're not going to do more of those lame card tricks, are you?"

"I thought maybe just three before dinner," Andorn said.

"Lame. I mean, most card tricks are boring anyway, but there's no point to doing them at all with Mark in the room. He'll just mess them all up, like last night. Isn't he a swine? The worst we've ever had. If he makes just one wrong move, I think she'll divorce him like a shot. He's just a pretty-boy, that's all, nearly as pretty as your wife." She swished the stale water in one glass and added, with apparent feeling, "Your wife is really gorgeous."

"Isn't she just?" Andorn said, practising the card force once more.

"She knows it, too, I guess," Jeannie said, shrugging. "She said you were hung over this morning, so we went scuba-ing without you. Didn't Ricardo tell you where we were? It was that underwater cave we told you about. Weren't you so hot to try out that infra-red camera of yours?"

"I had to go to the bank," Andorn said.

She yawned again. "Everyone's always going to the bank."

Mark and Ava Lucere came in, with Della Andorn trailing. The women were in bathrobes, Mark in wet trunks and a velour shirt. He was as his stepdaughter had described him; a half hour out of the water, his hair had automatically curled into Greek-god ringlets. Ignoring a look from his wife, he poured himself a stiff drink.

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Mrs. Lucere turned her rather blank gaze on Andorn and said, "Oh, there you are, Chuck. Ricardo and Lupe will be serving dinner on the terrace in about ten minutes."

Although Ava Lucere was not unattractive at 40, her skin was leathery from too much sun, and her finishing-school diction added to a general impression of lifelessness. Della appeared all the lovelier by contrast, but Andorn wasn't looking at his wife.

"Well, I know a good way to kill ten minutes," Andorn said, flourishing the deck of cards.

"Don't you ever learn?" Della said. Mark made a noise. Mrs. Lucere said, "Be polite, Mark," but not as though she really cared.

"Here, I think I've got one you'll like," Andorn said, advancing on Mark, who sneered. He fanned the deck face-down. "Pick a card, any card."

Mark negligently tapped one with the bottom of his glass. Andorn used both hands to make the deck and said, "Okay, I've cut your card to the top. Now take it, look at it, but don't show it to anyone else."

"That's not my card on top," Mark said. "Mine's wet from this glass."

"Oh, why don't you just take it?" his stepdaughter said.

"Be polite, Jeannie," Mrs. Lucere said distantly.

"That's the card you picked, all right," Andorn insisted. "Take it, look at it, but keep it to yourself."

Mark took it and made as if to throw it away, but didn't. He looked at it for some time, and finally said, "Well?"

"It's the four of clubs, isn't it?"

"No, it isn't," Mark said, smiling thinly.

Andorn looked tense and surprised, as though this hadn't happened the previous night. "No?" he said.

"No, it's . . . the ten of diamonds."

"What are we having for dinner?" Della asked Mrs. Lucere.

"Something cold, I imagine."

"All right, I'll tell you what," Andorn said breezily. "Just keep that card"—Mark put it in his shirt pocket with exaggerated care—"and we'll try it again. Here. Pick a card, any card. Fine. Now I've cut it to the top of the deck. Take a look at it, but keep it to yourself."

Mark did so sullenly, holding the card closer than the first one. Again Andorn waited until Mark had cocked his eyebrow and said, "Well?"

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Now it was Andorn who was smiling. "The jack of spades?"

"No," Mark said, after a pause and a glance at the women. "It's the ten of diamonds—no, I mean the ace. The ace of diamonds."

"Come off it, Mark!" Jeannie said. "Let's see those cards."

Andorn, still smiling genially, admitted he wouldn't mind seeing Mark's cards.

"You said I could keep them, and I'm keeping them," Mark said, putting the second card in his pocket with the first.

"I'll tell you what," Andorn said softly.

"What?" Mark said, his voice softer still, contemptuous.

"This time I won't cut the cards. I won't even touch the deck. You take whichever card you want, and I'll call it. Sounds terrific, doesn't it? And it never fails. You can bet on it." He paused for a few moments, but if he was waiting for a response, he didn't get it. "Would you like to bet on it?"

"I'd like to bet against it," Mark said, "if that's what you mean."

"How much would you like to bet?"

"Whatever the hell you want, Chuck," Mark said. "Whatever the hell you want."

Andorn reached into his pants pocket and pulled out a brick of one-hundred-dollar bills in a fresh bank wrapper. He tossed it on the coffee table and followed it with another. "Two rolls of fifty hundreds," he said. "Ten thousand dollars."

"You're really weird, you know that?" Jeannie said. Mrs. Lucere murmured something inaudible.

"Chuck, what do you think you're doing?" Della said, and for the first time that afternoon Andorn looked her in the face.

"Shut up," he said, and she took a few steps backward.

Mark drained his glass. "The stakes suit me," he said. He went over to the big chair in the corner, where he'd hurriedly tossed his jacket on the way to the garden the night before. He fumbled through the jacket pockets, removing his checkbook and a pen.

"I *don't* think," Mrs. Lucere began, but Mark said, "It's my own account, isn't it? Well, isn't it? It can be made good Monday if I lose." He wrote out a check and placed it beside Andorn's cash.

Andorn sat nearby on the couch and told Jeannie to pick up the cards. She did, looking back and forth between the men's faces; both looked spuriously bored.

"Now shuffle them. That's good. Lay the deck on the table and mush the cards all over. That's it, mix them all up. Okay, Mark, take your card."

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Mark barely glanced at it; he watched Andorn with narrowed eyes. Andorn was smiling again.

"The ace of diamonds," Andorn said slowly.

"Mark said he already has that one," Della said in a high tight voice.

Andorn paused, pursed his lips judiciously, and said, "The ace of diamonds."

Mark looked at him a long moment, expressionlessly. "Yeah, that's right," he said finally, and put the card in his pocket.

"I don't believe it. I don't believe it. It's just too weird to believe," Jeannie said, as Andorn pocketed his bills and the check. His wife looked pale and puzzled as he took her firmly by the elbow and led her onto the terrace, Jeannie bouncing after them like a puppy. Mrs. Lucere waited until she caught Mark's eye, then pointedly turned her back and floated out.

Mark fished a cigarette lighter out of his crumpled jacket, sat at the bar, poured another drink, and slid an ashtray nearer. He pulled from his pocket the last card he'd picked, set fire to it, and dropped it in the ashtray. As it happened, it was not the ace of diamonds, but the nine of clubs.

When it was burning well, he pulled out the second card. It had no rank or suit; the original colors had been scraped off, and the following had been inked in their place: "$10,000 immediately, or show your hole card." He lit this one too.

The remaining card, the first one forced on him, read: "You and Della last night in the garden, you skunk. Infra-red film, remember?" He dropped it on the flames, and when all three cards were consumed he mixed the ashes with his finger.

He finished his drink and had another. Ricardo's obsequious voice drifted in from the terrace: "And he was correct? *Increíble*! Mr. Andorn, how do you do these wonderful things?" Still expressionless, Mark smashed every glass in the room against the floor, one at a time; then he went out and told Ricardo to clean up.

"Q"

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a *NEW* detective story by

JAMES R. BERRY

An interesting murder case in Stetville, Renselville County, the Berkshires, New England, with Sheriff Lande Hale presiding. And as Sheriff Hale opines, "Law enforcement is a mite more complicated than you'd think"—especially in Stetville . . .

YOU CAN'T KILL A DEAD MAN

by JAMES R. BERRY

There's a rougher, more hand-hewn justice that sometimes occurs in Stetville. But for all its rustic character it's no less accurate than the kind produced in city courtrooms where high-priced lawyers turn black to gray. At the very least Stetville's rural justice is swifter. If you ask Lande Hale, Sheriff of Renselville County, he'll swear that every law is applied by written code—punctuation included. But he'll be lying. And Leon Cambell's murder is a case that proves it cold.

I learned of Cambell's death at the general store's checkout counter—Stetville's equivalent of the cracker barrel. I was hoping the hardware department's dusty bins would hold an off-sized thrust bearing for the anemometer of my amateur weather station. I never got past an early morning crowd smothering Millie at the register.

Now, I won't say the mob was cheering. But as everyone chewed over Cambell's demise a lot of backs got slapped, a lot of eyes winked, and a lot of jaw muscles nearly wore out from wide sudden grins. In just two years as tax assessor Cambell had created new records for vox-populi unpopularity charts.

True, he had taken on a job whose occupational hazard is hurt

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feelings. But Cambell's unpredictable and arbitrary tax assessments had broken all previous records for creating instant municipal hate. Even historical town feuds had all but died out because so little rage was left over after thinking of Cambell. It didn't help that assessors were elected for five-year terms, with state laws making impeachment impossibly laborious.

While the crowd was gleefully deciding who'd be next assessor, Sheriff Lande Hale lumbered over. His uniform had sharp, starched creases, his Smokey the Bear hat sat square on his head, and his bulk was accentuated by a side-holstered police .38. His jacket sported a small, garish, rhinestone-embedded American flag. Overall he looked like a gorilla with a huge beer belly. His square-jawed face, which had been born with whiskers and kept a five-o'clock shadow ever since, was dark gray.

Lande edged through to where Millie was gabbling instead of ringing up morning sales. In what must have been long a morning ritual she slapped a packet of six cigars on the formica counter, this time without missing a syllable of gossip. The fact that Lande picked up change from a dollar bill showed the kind of weed he's partial to. He pocketed the cigars and surveyed the crowd. Smokes first, business second was Lande's motto. Even business about murder.

His glance picked me up on the fringe of the mob and he jerked his chin toward the exit, non-verbally asking if I had a minute. When I had come to Stetville several years ago, Lande found I was a free-lance computer programmer in science and medicine. I'd given advice on a few cases and somehow got pegged as his resident technological consultant. I didn't know what consultation Cambell's death might need but I'm as willing as the next person to offer a free opinion.

"Radoe Longstreet's in custody now," Lande said conversationally as we headed for his Sheriff's car, as though I was supposed to know who Radoe Longstreet was. We began the two-mile drive to Cambell's house and Lande filled me in.

"Longstreet shot Cambell some three hours ago, around six this morning," Lande said, emphasizing the time as though it were more important than the death. "He came to me later. Told me he shot him. Also told some others," he added regretfully, as though Longstreet had somehow violated protocol.

Lande sucked on his underlip and I was grateful he didn't do his thinking with the help of one of those ropes he calls cigars. Then, as though making an important proclamation, he added, "Radoe's

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seventy. But he's a dead shot with a 30-30. Jacked enough deer to be so. Cambell's dead for sure."

I digested this as I again wondered why Lande had asked me along. A guy shot Cambell. He admitted it. He gave himself up and was now in custody. The case seemed as clear cut as a guilty plea.

Cambell's gingerbread house was shaded by stately sycamores and their leaves rustled drily in an early morning wind as we walked up the back porch. Lande hesitated before opening the door and I realized he hadn't yet seen the body. We—and of course Cambell—were the only ones around. I didn't know all that much about Renselville County's homicide procedures. Still, it seemed quietly casual for a murder.

Cambell was in his bed with one eye closed and one eye open. He was dead, as Lande predicted—he'd been shot through a bedroom window. For some reason of decency I pulled the sheet, with a stain of red about abdominal level, over his face. An empty quart of expensive vodka lay beside the bed, confirming rumors about Cambell's nightly guzzling.

"Well now. Look here," Lande purred from behind me. He wormed one of his cigars from a pocket as he eyed the night table beside Cambell's bed. He lit up and with a deliberation that must have matched his thoughts, Lande blew out a perfect smoke ring. The ring gently rolled away, then simply stopped, as though hitting an invisible force field.

A white cone that steadily shed a diaphanous mist lay on the night table's center.

"Dry ice," Lande said with a sudden, alert satisfaction.

I shrugged. "So what?"

"Is it dry ice?"

"You just said so," I answered a bit testily. Viewing a corpse wasn't my idea of starting the day out right.

"Well, just maybe I'm wrong. You're the expert. Could be important."

I touched the stuff cautiously. Dry ice is frozen carbon dioxide and at over 100 degrees below zero it can cause instant frostbite. A square of blistered veneer indicated that the cone was the frosty remnant of a larger block.

"It's dry ice," I reported dutifully, squinting at Lande.

He grunted and blew out a quick, thin stream of smoke, the equivalent of most people kicking their heels in glee.

"That might explain it," he said.

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"Explain *what*?"

"Cause of death," Lande answered, his eyebrows rising as though the facts were plain enough for an ordinary man to understand.

"The guy was shot. With a 30-30 rifle. Probably used for jacking deer. Except when it pumps soft-nosed bullets into people," I retorted.

"Well, maybe yes. But more maybe no," Lande said with infinite patience.

I stared this time. The change from squinting felt good. "The guy shot Cambell, Lande. From outside the window. He gave himself up. You have evidence enough to convince a dozen juries."

Lande nodded gravely. "Law enforcement is a mite more complicated than you'd think, Randy. Looks to me that Cambell was already dead when Radoe Longstreet shot him."

I kept my cool, imagining this was all a rehearsal for a play—whether farce, comedy, or tragedy I didn't know. Lande's last statement was certainly the cue line for an inevitable question.

"And from what did Cambell die?" I asked dutifully.

"Dry ice," Lande pronounced. "When that stuff evaporates it hangs around a person's head. Cuts out the sweet air. Person can die of that. And from the size of that veneer blister it's been here hours before Radoe wandered around."

I kept my mouth shut, wondering where Lande had heard of asphyxiation by dry ice—as popular a way of using self-destructive evidence in crime fiction as stabbing with an icicle. The stuff was available in Stetville, used for freezing jacked deer by those who couldn't afford electric freezers. And there were plenty who couldn't. A root cellar and a block of dry ice worked as well and cost less. George Peprant, who mostly dealt in bottled gas, delivered the stuff as a sideline.

"You're letting Longstreet go?" I asked incredulously.

Lande sucked at the corner of his mouth as though mulling over a great hidden store of wisdom.

"You can't kill a dead man, Randy," he finally said, as though proclaiming a profound forensic philosophy.

The crunch of car wheels on gravel stopped the single word I was about to utter. Another character to come on stage. "That'll be Strickland," Lande said with contempt and then I knew for sure that the play being enacted in Cambell's bedroom was a farce.

Strickland was the county Medical Examiner and Coroner combined and he and Lande had been feuding for over 20 years. He'd

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left private doctoring, so I heard, when he gave antacid tablets to a woman complaining of stomach cramps. Ten minutes later she gave birth to a baby boy in her car. After that it was political plums or starvation for Strickland.

He blew in on a whirlwind of officiousness. He had a face made from wrinkled parchment, a bald head, and a high-pitched, strident voice. He wasn't over five two and had a nervous habit of rising on his toes, as though being intermittently taller was compensation for the short hand that genetics had dealt him.

"More trouble in your territory, eh, Hale," Strickland squeaked, as though Lande were personally responsible for all the evil in the county.

"Simple case of gunshot, Doc. Even you can spot that," Lande said, dripping sarcasm.

I let out an exasperated sigh, not bothering to squint or stare at this one.

Lande looked at me casually as he spoke.

"Where's the dry-ice theory gone to?" I asked with a tinge of sarcasm, and I thought I saw relief flicker across Lande's face.

"Dry ice!" Strickland's head lurched up like a gopher's from its burrow and he stretched high on his toes, setting heels to ground just before losing balance. "You didn't say anything about dry ice, Hale. That can be a murder weapon, you know," he said with sententious drama. I could see that Strickland already thought of Cambell's murder as a lecture for the next meeting of the Association of County Coroners.

"Don't say," Lande responded humbly, his heavy bristle of eyebrows rising in astonishment.

Strickland gave a snort of contempt that indicated Lande's ignorance was too invincible to be corrected. Then he busied himself with Cambell. God knows exactly what he did, or why. He yanked back the bedsheet, then poked and pulled, stroked and twisted both limbs and flesh. Whatever his routine, it looked more like a shaman trying to resurrect the dead than a post-mortem exam.

Finally Strickland stared at the cone of dry ice, glee on his face, then fumbled in his black bag for a syringe. He dropped it once and only a carpet kept it from breaking. He punctured Cambell's arm in several places before drawing blood. I decided that the woman who had that baby in her car was lucky. At least she and her infant had survived.

"The blood will show acidosis, a sure sign of asphyxiation," Strick-

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land concluded as he peered at the syringe, already calculating blood gas levels. I felt sorry for any facts that stood in his way.

With all his probing, Strickland hadn't, really, examined the bullet wound. He was obviously running to the goal post with the highly exotic, dry-ice theory of death rather than the more prosaic, everyday, run-of-the-mill gunshot hypothesis.

Strickland abruptly turned to Lande and the corners of his thin mouth stretched into a large ugly grin. "Case solved, Hale," he said, and I wondered what case he was talking about. With a conclusive snap of his black bag Strickland strutted from the room and into his next fantasy.

"Well," Lande said in a breathy exhale that indicated the end of a hard morning's work, "guess I'll get Longstreet from the county jail now. He'll be anxious."

"You know damn well that *whatever* you claimed, Strickland would have taken the opposite side," I said, too confused and angry over a clear-cut killer going free to even wonder about Lande's out-of-character solicitousness over a jailed prisoner.

"Our coroner is a bit notional," Lande agreed pleasantly as he lit up his dead cigar. The stale end dissolved into bursts of flame-filled smoke before catching.

"If Longstreet didn't kill him with a bullet, that leaves someone who did with dry ice," I added, testing out Lande's reaction to incisive logic.

"Correct," Lande agreed with a sage nod. "And that will be the subject of further police investigation." Lande didn't try to be pompous. It's just that you can't say a sentence like that and have it come off any other way.

Two days later I was on my way to Pittsfield, still looking for that off-sized thrust bearing. Questions over Cambell's murder had coalesced into a nagging curiosity that kept up a constant itch to be fed. I was passing Stetville's general store, saw George Peprant—the bottled-gas and dry-ice man—and decided to throw that curiosity a few tidbits.

Peprant had a long protruding face with an overhanging top lip and a perpetual shoulder hunch. Somehow he always reminded me of a slow-witted but good-natured camel. Tufts of wiry hair stood out from his head like weathered corn shucks. He wore an incredibly greasy cotton workshirt and was wrangling with the hydraulic lift platform of his battered delivery truck as I walked up.

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"Need gas, Randy?" Peprant asked by way of openers, nodding to the five-foot-high steel bottles of butane.

"How about some dry ice instead?"

Peprant's oval brown eyes slowly enlarged, as though it took time to assimilate a request like that. "Jackin', Randy? Didn't think you needed to go out of season."

"I'm not. But I was wondering if Cambell was," I lied. "Have any idea?"

Caution suddenly watered down Peprant's eyes and they filmed over with a wet, protective mist. I could almost see the gates inside his mind creak open, letting ideas roam around like cattle cautiously testing new pastures.

"Guess he was," Peprant said hesitatingly after considering all the angles he was capable of handling.

"Why? Did Cambell order dry ice the morning he was killed?"

Peprant began to move in a kind of nervous dance while tapping the lift platform with his wrench in a steady, clanking tattoo.

"Someone called for a block. I put it on Cambell's porch at first shadow. Wardens don't drive 'fore early breakfast," Peprant explained. Game wardens had found that dry ice meant jacked deer, dooming Peprant to early delivery hours.

Peprant stopped his dance and drumming, thinking hard how to phrase a question, then asked, "Why you want to know, Randy?"

"Curiosity," I replied truthfully. I ordered a bottle of gas from Peprant, mostly to relieve my guilt at causing him the agony of thinking.

On the half-hour drive to Pittsfield I mulled over what I had learned. Someone had, actually, tried to kill Cambell with dry ice. Certainly Cambell didn't order a block. He wouldn't dare jack deer, with all its inherent penalties, given his popularity rating. Besides, he was well off enough to afford a freezer. So the dry ice was delivered with malice aforethought. I guessed. I knew that asking Peprant who placed the order would be like talking to the Great Stone Sphinx. Possibly he didn't even know.

But whoever planned to kill Cambell with dry ice overlooked one fact. Perhaps they teach police cadets to be on the lookout for this dramatic modus operandi. Lande knew of it and even Strickland did—proving that the idea had sunk to the lowest possible levels of criminal investigation.

But there's a problem with dry ice as a murder weapon.

It doesn't work.

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Carbon dioxide sinks, true. But not just to the level of a person's head. It flows to the floor and spreads out, just as water from melting ice would do. More, excess carbon dioxide in the blood causes an atavistic, irresistible urge to breathe, even when drunk. Hold a breath for more than a minute to see how overpowering this compulsion becomes. No, Cambell was safe from the start—from being asphyxiated, anyway.

I was still pondering this three hours later as I drove down the gently winding dirt road leading to my old farmhouse, taking in the green fields and rolling land I call mine. I had found a thrust bearing in Pittsfield, and a few flicks of a file to size it would get that anemometer turning smoothly again.

Lande Hale was on my porch, sitting in a chair, its back tilted against the house, puffing on what pass for cigars. It didn't take me more than a few steps over the sloping front lawn to connect his visit and my earlier conversation with Peprant—the deliverer of bottled gas and dry ice.

"Drink, Lande?" I asked and the idea got an approving nod. He was in uniform and the fact he accepted a drink while on duty signaled that this was an informal, off-the-record talk. I wasn't sure I wanted any talk about Cambell to be off the record.

I mixed two bourbons and came back to the porch. A cool, early summer breeze wafted over it, carrying the warm smells of old pasture land that surrounds the house.

"Used to be a lot of old dirt roads round here," Lande reminisced after a long sip. "Fact is, one used to run down that slope and into the woods." He pointed idly with his cigar toward a rolling green pasture that cost a walletful each year to have mowed. Other oldtimers had told me of that road. No trace of it remained other than in memories.

Lande didn't seem upset by my silence.

"And do you know why there aren't so many old dirt roads any more?" he continued, as though willing to slake the wildest of curiosities. I shook my head and sipped.

"Motor cars, that's why," he stated in a deprecating tone that suggested cars were enjoying a brief moment of popularity before returning to oblivion, like passenger zeppelins. "When cars came they got one place to another faster than horse and buggy. Didn't need so many roads then."

"What's all this got to do with Cambell?" I asked, never doubting that his murder was on both our minds. I wondered how Lande could

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tie in old dirt roads with a man officially killed by asphyxiation by parties unknown—but actually dead of gunshot wounds by Radoe Longstreet.

"Trouble is those old roads, like that one there," Lande continued, ignoring my question as he again pointed to the bushy pasture, "is still on the town maps. Never did get round to taking them off. No real reason to."

A dawn of a dream buzzed through my mind. "Cambell's new tax policy," I said. It wasn't a question.

Cambell's most unpopular move was a new kind of land tax. The first acre, or part, was taxed high. Real high. The second acre was scaled down, and so on. The catch came if someone owned two separate and distinct parcels. The first acre of each was taxed fresh. The final assessment could be staggering. For a few dairy farmers with separate pastures the tax bill had been ruinous.

Lande nodded sagely. "Yep. And can you guess what Cambell was counting as a divider between land parcels?"

"Those old dirt roads that are still on the maps," I said sadly, looking again at the invisible dirt road that had as much tangible substance as the equator, but was legal dynamite. "How come he didn't hit me with that kind of double tax?" I asked.

"Maybe he didn't want your land. Least, not yet."

My glass nearly slipped from my hand as I felt an involuntary twinge of fear run through me. The idea that I'd have to give up a square inch of the 50 acres I owned, acres that were my moat from the outside world, was terrifying. This was my territory and I needed it. "Whose house did he want?" I asked, hearing the legs of Lande's chair creak as he tilted back and forth.

"Widow Longstreet was one instance," Lande answered. "She had the prettiest view I've seen. Fifty miles in any direction." I noticed that Lande used the past tense.

"That hill was once a buggy crossroads," he continued. "Three roads. Divided her property into four separate parts." Lande looked over my fields as though he again saw a horse and buggy and heard the tinkle of its bells.

I vaguely knew Widow Longstreet. She had given a quilting demonstration to the Stetville Historical Association, an organization formed by ex-city people who were turning Stetville's history into heritage. Even at 85, and I noted she gave birth to Radoe when she was 15, her eyes had been bright and alert. Her quilts were beautiful.

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"And Cambell socked a fresh tax on all four parts," I stated, knowing the answer. "I suppose she couldn't pay." I knew the answer to that one, too.

Lande let out a huge puff of smoke, which changed shapes like tormented ectoplasm as it drifted across the porch. "She did get an offer to sell. From a developer called McKinley Enterprises." Lande stretched casually. "Now, Randy, if you was to guess real hard, who'd you say had a big-money hand in that McKinley Enterprises."

"Cambell," I said slowly, realizing that Lande was leading me by the hand to some as yet unfathomable destination. I don't know where he uncovered that information. But there's precious little he doesn't know about the workings of Renselville County.

"She lost it, then," I murmured, thinking of how Widow Longstreet's fate could have been mine. The idea that the fields I was looking at could be raped by bulldozers, by rows of jerry-built houses, and by scores of people caused a flash of hatred and rage.

"She died," Lande corrected. "Of heartbreak, pure and simple. Heartbreak at losing a place she'd lived in all her life. Out of fright for a new place."

I felt a new surge of rage, perhaps because of my own fear of being dispossessed, perhaps at the violence of premeditated murder. "So Radoe Longstreet, her seventy-year-old son, killed Cambell in return," I said grimly.

"Don't count when you shoot a corpse," Lande reminded.

I swallowed a gulp of my drink and thought of the wild coincidence of two attempts at Cambell's life on the same morning, one hopelessly inept, the other highly effective.

Then a phrase that Peprant used zoomed into focus. ". . . delivered at first shadow," he had mumbled, using the local vernacular to describe a sunrise.

I had watched a sunrise just this morning, a cup of dark coffee in hand, once again marveling as the misty Berkshire foothills emerged from darkness. At this time of year that had been about 6:30. Cambell was shot at 6:00. His dry-ice killing was more than inept. It was about a half hour too late.

Then, with belated insight, I knew that Lande had ordered that dry ice himself and conned Strickland. And first he had conned me.

"You wanted me to tell Strickland about the dry ice. Someone else to point it out as though you didn't realize what it meant," I blurted out, having enough sense to keep everything else I knew to myself. Radoe Longstreet's shooting spree had caused Lande some

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quick and fancy improvisation, including me as part of the supporting cast. Whatever else I was feeling, my admiration for Lande's Byzantine thinking soared.

I eyed my phone through a porch window, thinking that one call to someone I knew in the State Police would bring a real autopsy of Cambell and put a murderer behind bars. Lande saw my look.

"Leon Cambell killed Widow Longstreet by stealing her land as sure as he'd of strangled her." Lande's inflection hardly changed but somehow a profound bitterness crept into his tone. "And he had the same plans for others like her."

"You know the widow long?" I asked, sidetracking the conversation while my thoughts untangled.

"She used to tuck me on her knee. Baby-sat me for a considerable time," he replied gently, and for a brief moment I was staggered. The idea of Lande being baby-sat for was like imagining a fire-breathing dragon once having been a cute little lizard.

"Cambell was legal, Lande. Dirty but legal," I said stubbornly.

"Written laws don't cover everything. Not sure, even, if they're supposed to," Lande retorted, letting loose a thick river of smoke. "Just 'cause Widow Longstreet was eighty-five wasn't reason to say she didn't have rights to live out her life as she wanted. On her land. Cambell murdered her with legal laws. Might be, though, that moral laws should be put to work, too."

Once again I glanced at the phone, thinking of how retribution is called revenge when administered by individuals but termed justice when handed out by law courts. It was a problem that had bedeviled civilized society for millenia, and trying to sort out the distinction between moral fairness and legal justice was making jelly of my mind.

One call, I thought, again angry at being used, angry at murder, angry that I half thought it was justified. I glared at Lande. "Even if Radoe Longstreet thought he had cause he hasn't the right to kill," I blurted, the concept of capital punishment overwhelming all other considerations.

Lande's face bore the stigmata of total patience. "Jail will kill Radoe Longstreet," he said clearly. "Two months at most. He's used to roaming, knows your place even. He'll die between cell walls," Lande reiterated, "and that's about as capital a punishment as you can get."

Again I saw the phone that could send a murderer to jail and have all the written laws on my side. Then he'd die of loneliness, despair,

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and confusion at a world that would have allowed his mother to be legally killed—with other targets already selected—and the killer lawfully in the clear, wealthier by their deaths.

I eyed that phone once more, then traced another stream of smoke to its source and faced two basilisk eyes. I thought of what Lande had said and what had been done and what couldn't be undone. I let out a long breath.

"You can't kill a dead man," I whispered.

A look of what might have been relief but was more probably approval showed on Lande's face. He grunted once as he maneuvered out of his chair and left without another word. I never will tell Lande I know that he put that block of dry ice on Cambell's night table; he knows that I know he knows. But it's a case where ignorance, feigned though it is, will bring a lot more bliss than otherwise.

A week later I came home to find a plastic bag filled with choice chunks of venison on my porch. The meat was cold and hard as a rock. Cold because in the bag's middle was a large chunk of dry ice, and I knew the bag had been left there by Radoe Longstreet.

I heard a whistle of wind in nearby white pines and smelled the scent of fresh growing grass. Then I looked lovingly over the rolling fields and thick woods I call mine and knew they were safe from another man's greed, and knew, also, that I'd enjoy every bite of that jacked deer.

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A Broadway actor and a lieutenant of detectives combine their talents to investigate the subway murder of Lila Montaine, a 65-year-old veteran of the theater, one of the kindest, sweetest, gentlest old character actresses who ever graced the legitimate stage . . .

MURDER OFFSTAGE

by LIONEL BOOKER

Lila Montaine was certainly not the best actress in New York, but she certainly was one of the nicest people. That's why all of us who had ever worked with her were a little shocked when we heard or read the news that morning that she had been shoved in front of the uptown IRT express at 42nd Street. I say we were a *little* shocked because, after all, such incidents occur with unhappy frequency, and the perpetrator wouldn't care that his victim was a sweet, sixty-five-year-old veteran of the theater who had been admired and loved by her colleagues.

My radio told me that she was standing on the subway platform at 11:40 p.m., attracting little or no attention until her flaying form was seen falling down onto the tracks of the oncoming train. She was killed instantly, which was a mercy because Lila was not a woman who had ever suffered much physical pain. Being an actress, she had, of course, had her share of the other kind—the disappointments, humiliations, and downright cruelties of our chosen profession; but instead of hardening or embittering her it had only given her a broader range of sympathy and warmth for her fellow creatures.

At the time of her death we were appearing in the same Broadway show, and despite the brevity of her appearance on stage, about four seconds longer than mine, she had become the focal point of the cast. Not one of us had ever suffered through a turndown or exulted over a victory without sharing it with this maternal, ever-gentle, ever-generous lady. Her departure from the theater that night will always be etched in my mind. The old threadbare coat and shapeless

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woolen cap, out of which stuck a few unruly silver hairs, the kindly wrinkled pale-blue eyes, and the friendly, yet aristocratic, smile on her withering lips were a constant reminder to us all that age was not necessarily an unmitigated horror.

Three days after I watched Lila disappear into the darkness of Eighth Avenue, the police showed up to interview us about her death. A half hour before curtain time every actor and crew member is expected to have signed in, so the stage manager waited until then before he made the announcement through the loudspeakers that hung on the walls of every dressing room.

"Throughout the performance tonight Police Lieutenant Shroeder will be backstage to question the members of our company with the permission of the management. Please give the Lieutenant your full cooperation."

I was on the next-to-upper floor of the Broadhurst, luxuriously alone in the tiny shoebox at the end of the landing which on occasion has been known to house five or six sweating, frantic chorus members. The landing was reached by a flight of stairs that went up and up in a spiral for what seemed like a mile before coming to the first set of rooms. Mine was two more stories up, and beyond that was a huge barn of a room comprising the entire top floor where supernumeraries and walk-ons prepared.

The climb is so horrendous that I usually made it only twice an evening—when I arrived and after curtain calls. If there were any costume changes in between, the clothes were brought down when you had your first entrance and kept in the basement under the stage where we spent our off time, playing cards and criticizing the leads.

I had just finished putting on my makeup and had at least 15 minutes before I was to go on. Relaxing in the only unbroken chair in the room, reading a well-thumbed paperback that a previous occupant had left along with a dirty sock and a sign above his mirror which read "Don't Forget to Take Your Insulin," I half listened to and half felt the drone of the players on stage which came through the speaker on the wall. After a few weeks in a show the voices of the performers become a kind of background music, noticeable only if a line or inflection is omitted or changed. Such an omission or change will suddenly jar the senses like a skipped note of a song. In this case, with Lila's understudy performing, it was as if a violin had been removed and a saxophone put in its place.

Gradually I became conscious of another foreign sound—the dis-

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tant wheezing of Lieutenant Shroeder as he neared the landing of my dressing room.

"My God," I heard his voice mutter between gasps. "How do they do this every night?"

After a while his heavy form was seen leaning against my doorjamb, clad in a wrinkled gray suit and sweat-soaked striped shirt. He nodded curtly, flopped down in one of the broken chairs, and let his pouchy eyes drift from the cracked plaster and rusty pipes to the containers of makeup under my mirror. There was a slight flicker of distaste and I was glad I had already put the stuff on, without having to do it under his steady and disapproving gaze.

"I only met Lila when I got this show," I told him, answering his question. "She was one of the sweetest people I ever knew."

"That's what everybody tells me," he sighed wearily.

"Well, believe them," I answered a bit sharply. "Of course, I had heard about her before."

"Yeah?" He suddenly looked at me, alert and expectant. "What did you hear?"

"I mean I knew of her as an actress. She's been around a long time."

"When you heard about her, did anybody sound like they had a grudge against her?"

"No."

"Know anything about her personal life?"

"Just that she had been married once but her husband died a long time ago."

"Of what?"

"Look, what is this?" I asked, setting down the paperback and getting up to put on my coat. I didn't hear my cue, but I could feel it approaching. "Why are you asking questions like that? She was just a sweet old lady to me, a sweet old lady who had to go home late at night and got mugged in the subway."

"Is that the way you see it?"

"We both know what Times Square has become," I said, buttoning my rather ornate costume. I could see Shroeder give that the eye, too. "It's worse on us because by the time we get out the audiences have all gone. You've got to go down Eighth Avenue alone, praying a cab will stop for you before a junkie does. During the last blackout we were like prisoners, afraid to stick our heads out."

"So how come this woman goes home on the subway?"

I shrugged. "Usually four of us share a cab, but that night we

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decided to catch a bite at Joe Allen's. Lila didn't want to wait. Either she was a little low on cash or she couldn't find a cab. I've had to take the subway myself at that time of night. I didn't like it but I had to do it. Look, was Lila mugged or not?"

Shroeder started to settle back but the chair took that moment to finally give way and he almost sprawled onto the floor. I caught his arm and he steadied himself and rose, brushing himself off and glaring around the room. It was obvious Lieutenant Shroeder wasn't enjoying his sojourn in show business. "We don't know," he muttered. "Her purse wasn't snatched and the guy doesn't sound typical."

"You mean you know who he is?"

"Just a few sketchy descriptions. Somebody said his clothes weren't rundown but not fancy either. He even had a newspaper sticking out of his coat pocket like a regular commuter."

I started for the door and he took the hint. We walked out onto the landing together.

"Another guy was standing next to the victim when the guy came up to her. He said he only saw him from the back but the guy went straight up to her, avoiding everyone else, and spoke to her. One word sounded like 'bitch.' Then he pushed her."

"So?" I asked.

He nodded, frowning, then sucked in a gulp of air, looking fearfully at the long flight of stairs leading to the top floor.

I didn't think much more about it until the next morning. I never read the papers, getting whatever is happening in the world from the radio and TV, but the article was shown to me when I was at a commercial audition around 11:30. There was no copy of dialogue next to the sign-up sheet to study, meaning it was one of those auditions where you have to smile admiringly at the girl who uses the right shampoo or heave a sigh of ecstasy on eating the right sandwich spread. These go pretty fast and there was only one other applicant in the waiting room.

I tend to meet the same people each time, character men of my own age and type or character women who would be apt to be married to men of my age and type. This time it was an actress named Jenny to whom I had been "married" twice, in a beer commercial and a bank commercial, and whom I had once served at a supermarket in a tissue commercial. She waved a tabloid in my face and asked angrily if I had read one of the day's Letters to the Editor.

"Listen to this!" she commanded. "Straight out of the middle ages!"

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She proceeded to read it to me, to the young secretary at the reception desk, and to anyone in Manhattan who happened to be passing by.

" 'The recent murder of an actress in the subway has once again drawn attention to the sordidness of a profession usually held in high esteem by our impressionable youngsters. I can only agree with a statement from the police in yesterday's paper that there may be other reasons behind the crime than the usual random act of a hooligan. The loose living and lack of moral scruples which have always characterized the theatrical profession will undoubtably be proven the real cause of this wretched woman's death.' "

"Loose living?" I asked. "Lila was sixty-five."

"And notice the little viper doesn't have the courage to sign it. 'Name withheld by request,' " bristled Jenny.

"That's terrible," said the secretary. "Such a sweet old lady, too. We had her up here a few months ago and all she did was keep worrying about my cold."

"That's Lila," I nodded.

"I was so pleased when they picked her for the commercial. I mean, she was so sweet and everything."

"Well," muttered Jenny, as we both rose, answering the beckoning finger of the casting girl in the doorway, "all I can say is I hope this jerk who writes letters doesn't find himself on a subway platform at midnight."

"At least not with you there," I said.

All the next week I met actors at auditions who had known Lila and had also been questioned by the police. "They wanted to know everything about her private life," one told me. "Especially if she had ever had an affair with anybody. When I told them she was just a sweet old lady they gave me a leer."

Friday I had an appointment with an agent who wanted me to sign some papers giving him the right to cash my checks. That way the agencies could send the checks to him, he could deposit them in his account, and send me his checks minus the ten percent.

It was while I was automatically signing sheet after sheet that I happened to remember something and asked, "Marty, you handled Lila Montaine, didn't you?"

Marty had just hung up the phone and looked at me in mock agony. "Please don't bring that name up. It's caused me nothing but trouble."

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"Have the cops been at you, too?"

"Yeah, but I was thinking of Lila herself. She could be a real pain." His phone rang and he spent four minutes promising to find four baldheaded actors for an industrial film. I waited until he hung up, then asked incredulously, "Lila was a pain?"

"Oh, she was a living doll personally. But stubborn! I never could get it through her head that an actress can't earn a living any more just doing stage work. But she says, 'I am an artist, Mr. Beckman.' Five years together and I was still *Mister* Beckman. Anyway, no TV for *her!*"

The phone rang and Marty spent more time promising to find a Mary Martin type for a straw-hat musical circuit. This is how you have to talk to agents—between phone calls. I would always marvel that no matter how complicated the phone conversations got they never lose the thread of the one in the office.

"But I thought she did a TV commercial."

"Yeah," sighed Marty, going through his files for baldheads and Mary Martins. "And it took everything I had to sell it to her. The Radford Agency put out a special call for actresses of her age group who had never done a TV commercial before. It was a natural for her. And I told her it wasn't like a Xerox or a Hallmark. You know, one of them fancy products that only get shown when they sponsor their own specials. This was for a detergent. Outside of headache powders and cold remedies, there's nothing that pays more. 'Soap and dope' we call it. The biggest moneymakers in the business because they're shown every ten minutes. Hold on."

I waited until he hung up the phone.

"How did it do? Her commercial, I mean."

He shrugged, going back to his files. "It was shown for a few weeks before she died. The checks haven't come through yet, but now with her picture plastered all over the front page and on the news, the sponsor killed it. I got the reel around here someplace. Want to see it?"

"Yeah. Why not?"

"Here. You know how to set it up."

He handed me a small reel of 16mm. film. When an actor does a commercial he thinks would be a good showcase, he asks the producer or the advertising agency for a copy to combine with other films of himself. This he sends around to other agencies and casting houses as examples of his work. I was surprised Lila had requested one since she was so dead-set against doing commercials.

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"She didn't," Marty told me as I threaded the film through the projection machine. "But I thought that if she was only going to do theater all her life, this would be the only film on her. I mean, look at Laurette Taylor. One of our greatest actresses and the only film on her is a screen test she once did. The same thing with a lot of them—Gertrude Lawrence, the Lunts, George M. Cohan. Just a picture or two apiece. Well, I figured there ought to be a record of someone as nice as Lila, too. Turn it on."

I started the projector and the light spread across the white screen set three feet in front of the lens, making an image about the size of a twelve-inch TV set. After a lot of flickering and slate identification Lila came on the screen, wearing a plain house dress and looking ill at ease. An announcer's voice boomed off-camera, "Here is what Mrs. Henry J. Newton of Yonkers, New York says about our new laundry detergent!"

Lila looked into the camera uncertainly and spoke in a voice that was too articulate for the average housewife, making an unsuccessful attempt not to roll her "r's." Underneath her image were superimposed, for a few seconds, the words A DRAMATIZATION.

"My grandchildren are all grown now but they bring their washday problems home to me. I tell them I used this soap on their parents' clothes and, if they're as smart as I was, they'll use the new, improved version."

The last few seconds showed Lila folding clothes on the washing machine as the announcer advised us that we would be smart to use the same detergent. Then the screen went blank.

"That's all that's left of Lila," said Marty wistfully as he reached for the ringing phone.

That night at the theater I was surprised to hear the wheezing of Lieutenant Shroeder coming toward my dressing room. I put down my book and nodded to him curiously as he staggered in and flopped down on a chair, a different chair from the one he had used before.

"Believe me, I told you all I knew about Lila before."

"Now tell me all you know about the Johnston woman."

"Her understudy?" I asked and smiled tolerantly. "That idea has cobwebs on it. An actress is killed by her understudy so she can go on in her place! Believe me, nobody would murder Lila for six lines. Plot lines at that."

He checked the back of the chair and then settled into it. "Okay. Then where does that leave me?"

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"Lila was killed by a mugger or a nut."

He sighed in frustration. "This is one of the screwiest cases I've ever been on. I know more about Lila Montaine than I know about my own grandmother, and in many ways they weren't that different. All I've got is a nice old lady who nobody—repeat, nobody—wanted to kill."

"Well?"

"Yet somebody did! After three unsuccessful tries!"

"What?"

"Her landlady told us about two of them. Two weeks ago Lila was coming out of her apartment house on 75th Street and walking toward Broadway when a car nearly ran her down. A car that almost came up on the sidewalk to get her. A couple of days after that she came home and found out that somebody had broken into her apartment. Luckily the super was with her when she entered because he wanted to check on a plumbing leak. They both heard the guy beat it down the fire escape.

"The third time was two days before her death. A friend remembers walking through the park with her that afternoon when they heard a loud noise off in the distance, like a car backfiring, except it was away from the direction of the street. Neither thought anything about it but I went to the spot where they had stood and found a bullet embedded in a nearby tree. We're checking it out now."

"Why didn't she ever tell anybody about this?"

"She never knew anybody had taken a shot at her, and the other times she put down to a reckless driver and a thwarted burglary. I asked the landlady if she had seen a guy answering the description of her subway attacker prowling around the place prior to this, but she said the only stranger who had been asking about Lila at that time was another gray-haired old lady who she figured was an old friend, although she didn't seem very friendly. Taking all three incidents together with the fact that she's now dead certainly indicates a pattern of murder. But why? Who in the world was mad at her?"

"She was so mad at Lila I refused to give her her address."

Donna Capanino is a casting director for The Radford Agency. I arrived at their offices on Lexington Avenue the next day, following a hunch. Usually I'm the last guy in the world who wants to get involved, but this thing about Lila was getting to me. It seemed so unfair that her private and personal affairs were being probed into

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with such cold precision just because she happened to be standing on a subway platform with a murderer.

I had thought of all the times she had sat with me during the performance of the play, listening to my complaints about how my career was going and lending encouragement as if my success would be a moment of real and sincere happiness to her. "You'll make it, darling. Just never give up." It seemed to me that she was asking my help now, begging me to find some answer to Lieutenant Shroeder's questions and give her death the same dignity and grace with which she had lived her life.

All night long I lay awake feeling there was something I missed in all the casual information I had picked up since the murder. Certain things about the one commercial she had ever done seemed strange to me, out of the ordinary, and needing further investigation. That's why I went to Radford.

Unfortunately I came during a children's call. Not just children but babies. The carpeted floor in the plush waiting room was crawling with them, and the air was filled with their assorted howls. The chairs were occupied by their mothers, all holding toys and pacifiers but making no attempt to silence any of their brood. Instead they chatted pleasantly among themselves as to whose baby was working on what, what residuals they were making, and the lack of job opportunities for eight-month-olds.

Donna was both annoyed that I wanted to interrupt the session for a non-professional matter and grateful for the relief. She was a brisk, efficient redhead with good legs and a good mind, both of which I appreciated. She led me into the audition room and slammed the door on the racket.

"This is a fine time for a social call," she said. "I've only got two more hours to see all those monsters out there and make sure none of them has teeth."

"It's too bad they all brought their babies with them."

"Very funny." She glanced down at the story board, a series of drawings depicting the proposed shots in the commercial, and shook her head in despair. "We've even got to get them to eat on camera. That can take a whole shooting day. Give me a nice hungry cat anytime."

"That last time I was here your secretary said you did a commercial with Lila Montaine. I wanted to ask you about that."

"You and the entire New York Police Department," she winced. "Why did we have to pick her? Of course we didn't have that many

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to choose from. Practically every character actress in New York has done commercials."

"That's one of the things that puzzles me. Why did it have to be an actress with no commercial experience?"

"The client insisted. It was based on a testimonial from a real person and they wanted it to look genuine. People see so many commercials now they recognize all the actors we use. In some parts of the country you people are more famous and recognizable than Laurence Olivier."

"Not since *he* started doing them, I'm sure," I said. "Is that why you superimposed the words A DRAMATIZATION?"

"Uh-huh. I think it's FCC rules. If we're recreating an actual incident, like some guy who re-lit his lighter two thousand times, or we're having a professional actress play a real person, we have to put that in."

She started to go back to the waiting room, dismissing me, but I went on. "Housewives can go on camera and play themselves, can't they? Union rules allow anyone to make one commercial without joining SAG."

"Sure, but sometimes the real person isn't right for the part. I know that sounds like a gag, but it happens. I had an airline pilot who looked terrific but spoke with a lisp, which didn't help the image. We hired an actor to dub his voice."

"What was wrong with the woman Lila was playing?"

She looked toward the door, wondering which was worse, answering my dumb questions or checking out baby gums. She decided in my favor.

"Well, it was a funny thing. She could speak all right but her personality grated. Nobody noticed it during the shooting but the camera catches those things. Cold as ice. Instead of a sweet old grandma we saw a harridan. We knew it had to be re-shot."

"So why use it? Shoots run into thirty or forty thousand dollars."

"The client liked the pitch. We had three generations going for us, and it would have been harder and probably more expensive to find another woman who could sign the same kind of testimonial. You can't just say something like that. You have to swear to it. So we decided to get an actress nobody around the country had ever seen before. The real woman raised hell about it. She said she couldn't understand why we couldn't use her, and what could we tell her—that she came out like an ogre? Anyway, we had her release, so she couldn't do anything about it. So she started taking it

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out on poor Lila. She said she wouldn't suffer the humiliation of an actress appearing under her name, and that she would get her husband to do something about it. She was so mad at Lila I refused to give her her address."

Yonkers isn't that far away and Mrs. Henry J. Newton was in the phone book. It turned out to be a pleasant little house on a grass-lined avenue, as remote from Manhattan as the moon. I rang the bell just as a small gray-haired woman came out the door, carrying her purse and looking at me with cold, hard eyes.

"What do you want?" she demanded in an infuriating, imperious tone, and I could see why the commercial had to be re-shot. She was the very antithesis of Lila, a woman who had let age and experience defeat her and turn her into a sour old crone.

"Excuse me, ma'am. Are you Mrs. Henry J. Newton?"

"I haven't got time to talk now, and I don't care what you're selling. Get out of my way!"

Without waiting for me to comply she stepped out of the house, shoved me away, and locked the door. Then she marched down the walk and stood by the curb, scowling at me.

"If you're not gone when I return I'll call the police."

It was at that moment that I noticed the car across the street start up and move toward the center of the road. It didn't align itself with the traffic lane but continued to turn until it was heading straight for the curb where Mrs. Newton was standing. Before I could cry out it shot forward toward the old lady whose attention was still directed at me, but then there came the squeal of another car turning sharply around the nearby corner. By this time Mrs. Newton was beginning to realize something was happening behind her and spun around just as the second car smashed headlong into the fender of the first, stopping its course.

The driver of the first car jumped quickly out of his vehicle, but instead of running away he took the same path in which his car had been going, straight for Mrs. Newton. In his hand was a gun and he pointed it at the terrified woman's head. The noise of the shot echoed incongruously down the green residential street and Mrs. Newton fell limply onto the sidewalk.

I ran toward her.

I'm not the bravest person in the world and the fact that the man still held the gun in his hand would ordinarily have made me hesitate. But I could see out of the corner of my eye that his arm was

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now firmly in the grip of the driver of the second car, who happened to be Lieutenant Shroeder.

"Well, everybody says television promotes crime." It was that same evening and I was listening to Shroeder have his little joke in the Yonkers police station. It was here that the man who took a shot at Mrs. Newton had been brought after Shroeder collared him. Mrs. Newton, who had been missed by the bullet but who had done a neat little faint onto the sidewalk, was home after being examined at a nearby hospital and picked up by her husband, a small gray mouse of a man who had all our sympathy. She was driven off promising to sue me, Shroeder, her attacker, and the manufacturer of the car that had almost run her down.

"The guy's name is Lundgren," Shroeder informed me as we sat sipping coffee in one of the offices. "About twenty years ago he got a girl named Helen Sawyer in trouble in Iowa where he used to travel around as a salesman. His story is that he really loved the girl but didn't know about the kid until it was too late. He was out selling while the girl worked as a housekeeper for a family in Des Moines. It was her misfortune that the family was named Newton."

"You mean—?"

"The same. Mrs. Henry J. When the old witch learned what had happened she threw the Sawyer girl out and made things so tough for her she couldn't get another job. A very upright lady, Mrs. Newton. Helen Sawyer wound up having the baby in a charity ward where they both died. When Lundgren finally returned to Des Moines and heard about it he got all fired up with indignation and liquor and sought out the Newtons, whom he had never met, but they had already moved out to Yonkers where old man Newton had a new job. Lundgren didn't know it was Yonkers. All he knew was they were gone, and I don't think he really cared that much anyway. In a way he was probably glad to have the responsibility taken off his hands.

"But as the years rolled on and he got older, he was faced with the problem of blaming his wasted life and shrunken bank balance on the fact that he was a terrible salesman, or he could just blame everybody else in the world for his own failures. That's always a lot easier and one of the people he blamed for robbing him of a wife and family was Mrs. Newton. Eventually it became an obsession with him and he used to spend a lot of time dreaming of what he would do to her if he ever found her. The big problem was that he

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had never seen her, didn't know what she looked like, or where she lived. Then one day—"

"He turned on the television set?" I asked.

"Correct."

I shook my head in wonder. "And there, in some rundown apartment, over one thousand miles away from here, a woman's image which is being transmitted all over the country comes before him and identifies itself as Mrs. Henry J. Newton."

"Nicely put," said Shroeder dryly, pouring himself a cup of coffee. "Well, that's when it all comes together for Lundgren and he thinks that all he has to do is settle accounts with Mrs. Newton and things will change for the better. He takes the next bus to New York and heads for Yonkers where he finds her name in the phone book, just like you. Only, when he goes to the house, he doesn't find the Mrs. Newton he saw on the television screen. Instead he finds a sour-faced old witch who tells him to get lost."

"And she can do it so beautifully, too."

"So he keeps a secret watch on the house, figuring the 'real' Mrs. Newton has to come home sometime. When she doesn't he begins to follow the witch around, and she leads him straight to the Radford Agency."

"Yeah. Donna told me she was there, asking for Lila's address."

"When she doesn't get it, Mrs. Newton borrows a trick from you and Lundgren and looks it up in the phone book. The landlady remembered a gray-haired old woman asking for Lila about then, but it was on a Wednesday. Lila was playing a matinee in that show of yours and wasn't home, but Lundgren now has another address to keep his eye on and he spots her coming home. He said he thought 'Mrs. Newton' had sold her house in Yonkers to the witch and moved to a Manhattan apartment. You know the rest. He tries to hit her with a car, he waits for her in her apartment, he takes a shot at her in the park, and finally he pushes her off the subway platform."

"But when he read who she really was in the papers after she died, he must have realized his mistake."

"Oh, sure. It gives him a few sleepless nights, but he's a guy who can justify everything in his mind sooner or later, and now he has another score to settle with Mrs. Newton. After all, she made him kill the wrong person, or so he thinks. He kept quiet for a while until he was sure we didn't connect Lila Montaine and Mrs. Newton, then he tried again."

I glanced up at the wall clock and realized I had to leave if I was

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going to make the half-hour call at the theater. Shroeder rose with me and offered me a ride to Manhattan which I accepted.

"But you did," I said suddenly as we came out of the police station.

"Huh?" he grunted, looking at me by the light of the street lamp.

"Connect Lila and Mrs. Newton," I answered. "Otherwise, why were you there this morning to stop another murder?"

"Oh, that was just a brainstorm of mine," he muttered sheepishly. "I was going crazy looking for a lead, trying to find somebody who had a motive to kill Lila, and then I remembered the letter."

"The letter?"

"The one in the newspaper that said the real cause of the murder was the victim being an actress. It sounded so insane and vindictive that I asked the paper for the name they had withheld. Mrs. Henry J. Newton."

I stared at him in amazement, unable to find my voice. He was looking down at the sidewalk.

"That's when I remembered the gray-haired woman the landlady saw. I wondered if it might be the letter writer. If so, it gave me the first real motive in the case, or so I thought. I didn't know then that the letter was just Mrs. Newton's demented way of jabbing at poor Lila's memory because of the commercial."

He paused a moment, took a deep breath, and blurted it out. "As crazy as it sounds, I thought maybe she might have had somebody—like her husband—kill Lila simply because she didn't like actors. That's why I drove up to Yonkers this morning."

I was not honor-bound to make him feel better by admitting I had come up with the same idea, but then there was no sense in rubbing it in either. I merely shrugged as we came up to his car.

"Well, nobody likes actors."

"Or cops," he sighed, sliding into the driver's seat of his car.

"Q"

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He was a fiction writer creating a plot, but in order to work out the details he had to become a detective . . .

TOMORROW WE FINISH ANN

by ROBERT TWOHY

The chimes chimed. I came out of Big Valley and went to the door.

A thin black-haired young guy in jeans and a T-shirt stood there. He looked surprised to see me. "Lisa home?"

"No. She and Heather went off to L.A."

"Oh. Who are you?"

"Her father."

"Oh, yeah. Greg said you were coming for a visit."

I nodded.

"I'm Jack Gruycker. I live down the street."

"Hi."

He looked nervous, and pretty hungover. He said, "I read one of your stories. Greg lent it to me."

"Which one?"

"About a guy fell down a flight of stairs. That was good. I liked it."

"Good. Thanks."

He lingered. "Uh—is that your car there in front?"

"Yeah."

"Uh—no, forget it."

"Forget what?"

"No, you're probably doing something."

I remembered what I was doing. Boiling water for coffee. I'd put it on and then got snared by Big Valley. Heath was caught under a capsized wagon and Barbara Stanwyck was trying to lever it up with a handy tree branch. It was harrowing. Then this Gruycker had chimed at the door. The water must be about boiled out of the pot.

I said, "Coffee," and turned and paddled into the kitchen. There

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was still water bubbling in the pot. I took it off the burner, turned to call that I'd be right with him, but didn't have to because he was there at the kitchen door.

"Want some coffee?"

"I could use it." He sat down at the table.

I got the jar of MJB Instant and expertly prepared two cups of coffee, running out of water halfway through the second. I asked if he wanted milk and or sugar and learned that he didn't. I gave him the full cup and ran hot water from the tap to fill mine. I put in milk and sat down across the table from him. "Forget what?" I asked again.

He sipped coffee and looked at the wall. "Tastes good. I tied one on last night."

"Oh?"

"Yeah. I don't often do that. Last night I did. I don't really know why. I told Ann I was going out for a couple and got home at two. Some guy drove me home."

I nodded. I wondered how Barbara had made out with the tree branch. It looked too big a heave for a fine-boned lady like her.

"A friend of mine. Just happened to be driving by The Anchor—saw me walking, picked me up."

"Good."

"At least I had the good sense not to drive home." He shot me a look.

My lightning brain put all this together. He'd got a ride home last night from The Anchor—so his car had been left at The Anchor. He'd come calling at 10:20 in the morning—but Lisa was off in L.A. I had a disreputable but probably serviceable old Pontiac in front of the house. Those were the facts. The conclusion was obvious.

I said, "Just a second." I got up, went into the livingroom, gave a big anguished closeup of Barbara a look of love and deep sympathy, and made her disappear. I wasn't too worried—I knew she'd figure some way to get Heath dewagoned.

I went back in the kitchen and said, "Where's The Anchor?"

"Not far. Down on Seaway. That's near the beach."

I knew Seaway. I used to live in this coastside town, years ago. I taught English here—then my wife and I split and I took off to the S.F. area. That was ten years ago. I drove a cab, drank a lot, fell in love a few times, fell out, had some stories published. Moracita's a nice town, dumb but peaceable. I like to come visiting. It's a change from the general hysteria of the Bay area.

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I said, "I'll drive you down there."

"Oh, no thanks—that's okay," he said. The hypocrite—pretending it was all my idea.

"No trouble. I'm going to drive down to the beach anyway. Would you like more coffee?"

"Sure."

I put more water on, turned on the gas.

He said, "My wife would have driven me in the station wagon but she's gone."

"Oh?"

"Yes. I woke up late this morning and she'd taken off."

He licked his lips, looked down at his hands on the table, fiddled them. I had one of my cosmic flashes. This lad wants to talk. He wants a ride, but he wants to talk too. Something's on his mind. He wanted to talk to Lisa about it but I'm here so he'll settle for me.

He raised his eyes and said quietly, "I'm scared."

"Because she took off? She's probably sore and took a ride to the beach to cool down."

He shook his head. "That's not it. I know where she is. She's at Beth's. That's her sister, over in Oxnard." That's a nearby town. "I called Beth and asked if Ann was there and she said she was but she didn't want to talk. I asked why. Beth said because of what I'd said."

"Well, a guy gets pretty stupid when he's drunk." How well I know. "She's still sore and probably has a right to be."

He looked at me and I sensed that he wished I'd shut up for a minute and hear him out. I shut up. He said, "I wouldn't have mentioned it if it was just some dumb domestic thing." He fiddled his hands a minute. "Do you know anything about dreams?"

"Not much."

"I don't either. Just the usual stuff—that they're suppressed fears, hates, desires, they come from inside. They depict things we don't want to think about. I'm speaking of bad dreams.

"I said something in my sleep this morning—Ann heard it. She'd just woke up and was getting ready to shake me awake so I'd make it to work. I never did make it. I called in sick. What I said scared Ann—and it scared me."

This time I kept my mouth shut, and waited.

"Beth told me what Ann told her I'd said. I was thrashing around and mumbling as she woke up. And then I got still, and got a kind of smile, and said, very clearly, 'Tomorrow we finish Ann.' "

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"That's what you said?"

"What Beth said Ann said I said."

"What Beth said Ann said. Do you believe you said it?"

"Ann wouldn't lie."

"Would Beth?"

"No. She thinks I'm a jerk but we co-exist—like in-laws do. She knows Ann loves me and hasn't ever tried to sabotage things. Far as I know."

I got up, did my masterful thing with the MJB, gave him his cup, and sat down with mine.

"Is your wife really scared that you may be plotting with someone to finish her?"

"No, I think she's scared that inside I have hatred for her, that maybe she doesn't really know me. The fact that once a month or so I go off on my own and get plastered—she never has understood why I do that."

"Do you?"

"Understand it? No. Maybe I have a drinking problem. I just get the urge. But I don't hate her, I love her. That I know."

"So you're not conspiring with anyone to finish her?"

He gave a dim grin. "Nary a soul."

"So what are you scared of?"

He licked his lips, gazed at his hands, and was quiet a minute. Then he said, very low, "Because I don't understand why I said it. And my mother was mentally—unstable."

In a word, he was afraid he might be somewhat nuts. Maybe he was.

I drank some coffee and said, "You spoke of a bad dream. You haven't mentioned it. All you've said is what Ann says you said out loud. Did you have a dream last night?"

"Yes. I dreamed I murdered a woman." He shot me a quick look. "Not Ann. This woman wasn't at all like Ann. I saw her very clear. I can see her now."

His eyes went from me to the wall. "About forty, forty-five, short blonde hair, soft blue eyes, kind of pretty, a mole on her left upper lip, near the corner. She was chubby, wore a green bathrobe. The dream didn't start with her. I was in a parking lot. There was a theater marquee—I couldn't read it. I was getting into a Pinto, a red Pinto. A woman in a gabardine jacket was driving. A beautiful woman with narrow bright eyes, bright red mouth. I kissed her and she drove out of the lot. I opened the glove compartment and took

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out a .22 pistol. I sat with it in my lap. Then the woman parked the Pinto. I got out, put the gun in my coat. I walked a little, past houses, cars parked in driveways—a residential neighborhood. I turned in at a tan house with a green door, and rang. A woman's voice said, 'Who is it?'

"I said something. The door opened, I went in. A living room, ordinary furniture, a green-striped couch. The woman was the chubby blonde in the green robe. We stood and talked a minute and then I got the gun from my coat, put it to her breast, and shot her. She fell in front of the couch.

"I went over, put the gun against her head, and shot again.

"Then I put the gun in my pocket. I went through a kitchen to the back door and out into a weedy yard. There was a fake plastic fishpond supposed to look like rock near a white gate. I went through the gate and was on a narrow dirt path between two garages. A tall red gate was at the end. I flipped a catch and pulled the gate open and was on a sidewalk.

"A car was coming up, lights out. I ran in front of it and the door opened. It was the Pinto. The beautiful woman smiled and I got back in and put the gun in the glove compartment. We rode and then we were in the parking lot where we'd started—there was the marquee. I leaned over and kissed the woman and got out and she drove away. I walked to a tan Olds and unlocked it, got in and drove away."

He had said all this in a flat voice, fast but clear. He turned his eyes from the wall, blinked, shook his head fast, and gave me that dim smile. "Some dream, huh?"

I asked, "Who were the women?"

"I don't know. I never saw either of them."

"They could be women you'd glanced at in the street, and somehow they registered in your brain." Me, the world-class analyst. I asked, "Do you own a .22?"

"No."

"Do you know anything about guns?"

"No."

"How do you know this was a .22?"

"I don't know. I mean I don't know how I know."

I took down the last of my coffee. "Pinto, Olds, tan house with a green door, phony plastic fishpond, white gate, red gate, gabardine girl, lady with a mole, 'Tomorrow we finish Ann'—nothing rings any bell, suggests anything you've seen, read, heard about?"

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He shook his head.

If it was a put-on, I couldn't guess the reason. But I'd had enough of it. It was too nice a day to sit around the kitchen giving attention to someone who might be just testing to find out if I'm as gullible as I look.

I got up. "I'll wash my face, get my shoes, drive you to your car."

It was a short ride. We made it pretty much in silence. He had me pull up near a white Toyota, all by itself in the nearly vacant parking lot at The Anchor. He said, getting out, "Thanks for the ride. Thanks for listening."

"What are you going to do now?"

"Probably drive out to Oxnard, try to talk to Ann. I'll tell her this whole thing is probably that I've been drinking too much. That's probably it—I'll tell her I won't booze it up any more . . . I hope it *is* the boozing. I don't want to wind up where my mother did."

He gave me that low-horsepower smile, and walked to his car.

I drove down Seaway to the beach, hoping the clear bright ocean air would float out of my head the near-conviction that I'd been an unhelpful, insensitive shlunk.

A beautiful day at the beach. Much better than I deserve. Anything halfway decent is better than I deserve.

People strolling, kids leaping, shorebirds doing their thing, gulls giving gull cries. Some hotshots surfing. A couple of tankers far out. The sea shining. And the golden California sun embracing all.

I walked along the damp sand at the edge of the water. I had my shoes and socks in one hand, my pants turned up. I stopped after a while and took off my shirt, slung it over my shoulder, and strode off again, all energy and bouncing pink flab. People looking my way must have got a real lift of their spirits.

I walked a fair distance, almost to the pier. A lot of people were out there, some fishing, most walking. It's a long pier. There's a sandwich shop on it, at the near end. I thought I might get a sandwich and a beer later, but just now sitting and watching and listening to the sea was a better thought. So I turned and angled up from the damp sand.

A couple of good-looking women in their thirties were sitting on a blanket. One was greasing up, the other, already primed for grilling, was gazing idly over toward the pier. I walked up beyond them, then over behind them to a good smooth place, spread my shirt, deposited my shoes and my flab on the sand. I lounged there, think-

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ing maybe I should move back here. The Bay area is getting too frenzied for a philosophical sort like me.

In front of me the woman gazing toward the pier stiffened, said, "Hey! Is that Ann Hadley?" The name gave me a little sting. As if at least one of any ten women isn't named Ann.

The greaser turned to look. "Where?"

"Near the sandwich shop there, on the pier."

"Yeah. That's her."

They looked at Ann Hadley, who must be one of the three or four women in the cluster near the sandwich shop.

The woman who had spotted her said, "I saw her at Donovan's party last week."

"Yeah? Who was she with?"

"Phil Leek."

"That juvenile delinquent? Is she back with him?"

"It looked that way."

"I thought Joe Wandle was *numero uno*."

"He was, but Jane got wise to it, finally, and told Joe to knock it off. So he did. Except not quite."

"So Phil's back in the action, and Joe's still on hand . . . Who else?"

"Pete Sanzer."

"That mouse?"

"Ann's a sorceress. She turns mice into tigers."

They laughed. The other woman said, "She's overage, overweight, she slumps, she never says a thing worth listening to, she gives off all the sexy aura of a baked banana."

"So *you* say. The men say different."

"You're so right—and she's got the scalps to prove it. What d'you suppose she's got that we don't got?"

"Maybe it's that darlin' li'l mole on her lip."

"D'you think *that* could be her secret?"

"Sure. It secretes a special fluid that gives off an aroma women can't pick up, but it drives men mad with desire."

The women giggled over that. I, the nosy writer, tuning in on this fairly good dialogue with some interest, vaguely struck by the slight coincidence of the name of this *femme fatale*, didn't giggle. I had a big sharpening of interest. How many middle-aged chubbies named Ann with a mole on the lip could there be in Moracita County?

Assuming Gruycker *had* dreamed of killing a woman, he could well be lying when he told me he didn't know her. If Ann on the

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pier was the Ann of his dream, he could be one of the horde that she'd worked her sorcery on.

If so, why the hell lay out the dream for me?

I stopped pondering and went back to eavesdropping. The women were talking now about Brad.

"I saw him just last night."

"Did you? I haven't seen him in months."

"No, he's not part of the scene any more. You can't blame him for that—Ann's still in it, so he's pulled out."

"He has another girl, I suppose."

"If he does, nobody knows it. Wherever he plays it's not around Moracita. When Charlie and I saw him last night he was alone."

"Where'd you see him?"

"That place up on Seaway—what is it? The Captain's Cabin?"

"No, they changed the name. It's The Anchor now."

"That's the place. He was sitting at the fireplace, having a drink. Looking good. Brad always was a distinguished-looking guy."

"Did you talk to him?"

"No—what's to say? He's ancient history."

"I pass his shop now and then. He's got some really nice stuff."

"Yeah, he knows his business. That was just a dinky little two-bit store when he took it over. Now it's got real class—one of the best furniture shops this side of L.A."

"Ann must have got a pretty good settlement."

"I suppose so. She doesn't have to work. She's got a little house down on Allison. That's not much of a neighborhood, of course, but one thing about her, she never went in for a splashy front. She's got her good points, I don't really dislike her . . . Of course, when I find out Charlie is one of her scalps and has been for years, I'll sing a different tune."

She laughed. The other woman shot a quick look, then laughed too, even louder. In fact, the laugh kind of took her over. Charlie's wife or girl friend stopped laughing for a second, and looked puzzled. Then she went back to laughing. It didn't sound quite as free and easy as it had sounded before. The other woman seemed to really get a boot out of whatever she was getting a boot out of.

The hilarity finally wound down and they looked at each other. They didn't say any more but lay down to let the sun stroke their tawny frames even tawnier. I was glad they'd stopped gabbing, because I wanted to go out on the pier—but hadn't wanted to miss anything.

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By now I might have missed Ann though. She might have gone back off the pier and be away down the beach. But I hadn't observed a tubby going down the wooden steps, so she was probably still there.

I put on socks and shoes, draped my shirt over me, ambled to the wooden steps, and climbed the stairs to the pier.

The reason I wanted to see her was mostly curiosity. A woman who had eaten her way into the hearts of so many men should be worth a look . . . And maybe another thought was giving little tugs for my attention. I hadn't been in love for a long time. Could this dumpy, slumpy little woman be the one to thaw the icicles that had formed around my lonely heart? Could this be The One whom Fate had me Intended For?

Damned if I knew. But she was worth a look.

Which was the way my brain rattled on, as I put on the back burner the notion that this could be the woman whom Gruycker, in his dream, had shot—and if she was, how did she fit into his life?

On another back burner was the knowledge that Brad, the furniture king, had visited The Anchor last night.

I lingered by the sandwich shop and saw no one with the proper qualifications. I walked on. People were walking on the pier, or lounging at the rails, fishing, gawping, dozing. I shot glances right and left, no doubt looking flabbily furtive. It's a long pier. I passed a lot of people, going, coming, stationary. Then I saw a lumpy female form at the far end, leaning on the rail, looking out at the horizon.

She wore a tan sweater, slacks, a bandana loose over her hair, which was short and blonde.

Some people were lolling around at the sides but she was alone at the end of the pier. I strolled up, leaned on the rail, and gazed out with a small, sad smile, like a man weary of the pains and passions of life but bearing no regrets—none he would ever speak of. I gave a slow shake of the head, the sad smile continuing. Then something went plop on my hand.

That's the way things seem to go for me, and why nobody really takes me seriously.

I shook my hand vigorously over the rail, ducked to scoop up a sandwich wrapper near my ankle, massaged the hand with it, turned to look for a trash barrel, saw one fairly far back, decided the hell with it, and let the paper drift off my fingers in the breeze. I turned to look at the woman, and saw soft blue eyes and a smile. Accentuating the smile, topside left, was a cute black mole.

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"Naughty seagull," she murmured.

I gave her my regular smile, which lacks mystery. I thought, the critics on the beach were right—this woman was slouchy, pouchy, obviously of many seasons, and what's that French phrase? I can't pronounce it, but she had it—*je ne sais quoi.*

I said, "You're Ann Hadley, aren't you?"

"Yes." Her eyebrows went up in surprise.

"I thought I recognized you."

"Have we met?"

"Yes. At a party. Donovan's. Last week."

"I can't place you. What's your name?"

I told her. She said, "It doesn't register."

"That figures. You had eyes only for young Phil."

"I did? That's not like me. I usually remember a new face. Are you a new face?"

"To Moracita? I used to live here. Now I live up near San Francisco. I'm visiting my daughter."

"Oh. Well—I'm sure we've never met, I know you're lying about Donovan's, but—welcome back to Moracita."

"Thank you. How do you know I'm lying?"

"I just know. I'd have noticed you, and remembered."

Wow. The way she said it, and her little smile—it twitched the little black mole, which seemed to twinkle at me. Charlie's woman could be right, the mole could be the key to Ann Hadley's success.

Then it stopped twinkling as she turned away, gazed over the splendid sea, and said in a calm voice, "What are you after?"

"What? I—well, I thought I knew you." That line hadn't worked and wasn't going to. I shifted gears. "A friend described you. That's how I guessed who you were."

"And what are you after?"

"His name is Gruycker. He's a young fellow—do you know him?"

"No." She looked at me full. Her eyes were still soft, but didn't offer much promise. Her mole didn't twinkle. "What are you after?"

Noplace to hide. "This Gruycker had a dream about you. He says he never saw you but described you in detail, said he killed you with a .22. I don't know what the dream means—or if he's lying. I wondered if it might make any sense to you."

She ran her fingers over her small chin and gazed over the water. After a bit she said, "You're telling the truth now?"

"Yes."

"Who are you? I mean, what do you do?"

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"I'm a fiction writer. Also a cab driver."

"Also a detective?"

"What? Why do you say that?"

"Are you working for Brad?"

"No. I don't know Brad. Who's he?"

"You can tell him that finding out things about my private life won't help him any. The settlement isn't contingent on how I live, as long as I'm legal—and don't remarry. Apart from that I can live any way I want to."

"That's fine. But I don't know Brad, and I'm not a detective."

"Why did you tell me this lie about a dream in which I get shot?"

"I'm not lying about it."

"Is this some subtle message Brad is sending me? A threat? Like, if I don't consent to a big reduction in the settlement—which he's asked to my face—something drastic could happen to me? Am I supposed to brood over that possibility?"

I said, looking pretty miserable and bedeviled I'm sure, "I don't know what you're supposed to do." It occurred to me that *she* was the featured corpse in the dream, if the dream was true, so she should be listening, not shooting harpoons at me. I took a breath, drew up to full flab, and said, "Listen, Mrs. Hadley, I'm not a detective and I don't know Brad. A strange dream apparently involving you got dreamed by a man named Gruycker. He says he doesn't know you—you say you don't know him. But he describes you perfectly in the dream. And other things he describes—do you have a green bathrobe?"

"That's a high-percentage guess."

"Do you have a green-striped couch?"

She took in a sharp breath, and the eyebrows went up.

"Do you have a weedy back yard with a phony plastic fishpond and a white gate?"

Now I saw how big her eyes could get.

"That's what he described. And beyond the white gate is a narrow dirt path between two garages, and a tall red gate at the end."

She said, very low, "My yard's not visible from the street behind. And you couldn't have known the gate was red on my side—it's white outside. And too high to reach over and open . . . A dream? This was all in a dream?"

I nodded. She suddenly shook her head and gave a quick laugh. "For a minute you had me going. I was frightened, felt a chill . . . You're good. Maybe you *should* write detective stories, you have a

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way of making it seem real. Who's idea was it, this dream, yours or Brad's?"

"Neither—it was Gruycker's dream."

"Everything you described Brad's seen. He's been in my house, my yard . . . I don't know his plan here, why he sent you to tell me all this. I thought you people were more inclined to sneak around the edges."

I am. But what she meant was detectives in general. Which I'm not.

"Something to frighten me with, something to trigger me maybe into some kind of appeal to the court for protection—as if I'm turning neurotic, incompetent. I don't know. He's too subtle for me."

We were quiet a minute. She was leaning on the rail, her arms folded around her, kind of hugging herself. Maybe she still felt the chill. Her plump, pretty face had a bleak look.

I said, "Does Brad have a .22 pistol?"

"Not that I know. Don't *you* know?"

"Does he have a girl friend?"

"Where are we now? What are you up to now?"

"I wish I was as devious as you think I am. It'd help in plotting stories. I'm asking because a very beautiful girl was in this dream. She drove a red Pinto."

"Really." The word was contempt. "You're just full of sharp little details, aren't you? But dreams don't come that way. They're fuzzy, illogical, don't come in neat packages—"

"Right. That's why this one's so strange. *Do* you know a beautiful girl with a red Pinto?"

"No. Does Brad? Is that what he wants you to tell me? That he's got a really hot love affair going and means business about getting the settlement reduced, that he wants to move on, up and away—and I'd be smart to play ball, or I might get hurt?"

She turned, faced me. "It won't work. Tell him that. Tell him I think the world of his cleverness but it won't work. The settlement stands, big love affair or not. Goodbye, Mr. Detective."

She bounced away down the pier.

I stood a while, looking after her, congratulating myself on the smooth and masterful way I'd laid things out for her.

I turned, leaned on the rail, stared at the water, expecting any second to get a plop on the head.

It seemed the logical follow-up.

I thought of what I'd learned so far, since this fine day had started.

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Gruycker had dreamed of the murder of Ann Hadley—or he hadn't.

He'd dreamed details of her living room and yard—or he hadn't.

Brad could have told him. They could be working together. They could have met last night at The Anchor.

Brad was hiring Gruycker to use me to send a message to Ann Hadley and the two women on the beach were hired to say her name as I sat behind them and she was hired by my various enemies to keep me in converse at the end of the pier long enough for a trained seagull to be released from a nearby coop and fly over and plop me on the head. Or not.

I turned and walked off the pier. Ann was long gone, wherever she had gone. I walked back up the beach, past where the two women, prone on the blanket, were lightly bubbling like two slim fish on a slow griddle. I got to the Pontiac and pulled out, got on Seaway and headed for home—then took the first stoplight right, turned left on Cable, the main drag, and drove downtown.

Downtown in Moracita is unreal, you can park anywhere. Mostly because businesses have drifted off to the suburban shopping centers. But the main-branch banks are still downtown, the civic center, the old historic buildings that are in the brochures and that no true Moracitan would ever set foot in. And some of the classier shops. Somehow it's niftier to be located on a decaying downtown street than in a suburban center—that is, if you're a *really* classy shop.

I parked and went in a phonebooth and got the directory; I thought I'd hit first the white pages, then check the yellows under Furniture. I tried the B's—for Brad. I found Brad's Bar BQ and Bradley's Fun-Time Lounge. I went on to the Hadleys. There were a bunch of them, but only one I needed—Hadley's Furniture, 141 Rose.

I looked back up the Hadleys and saw a residence listing for Hadley, Bradford G., out towards Ojai. I looked for Ann Hadley but she wasn't listed.

I walked a block and a half, turned down Rose, and saw a small apologetic sign, HADLEY, on a moldy old two-story frame building that looked ready for the wrecking ball. A small parking area was next to it. A couple of cars were parked there. One was a blue Ford, the other a late-model Olds. Light tan.

I opened the glass door of the shop and went in.

A young guy in a nice suit came at me down a row of good-looking furniture and gave me an upper-class smile, reasonably silly. I asked, "Mr. Hadley?"

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"No, I'm Mr. Greve. Can I help you?"

"No, it's personal."

"Ah. Well, Mr. Hadley should return in a few minutes."

"Which bar does he go to?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"I passed Sporting Life up the block. Would he be there?"

He made his upper lip long. "I wouldn't have the least idea."

"Thank you." I headed for Sporting Life.

I had a hunch I might know him by sight. He was supposed to be distinguished-looking. You don't see too many of those in middle-class California beach towns.

What I figured to accomplish by seeing him I'm not sure. I don't think I was figuring anything. I was following the same impulse that had sent me tracking out on the pier after Ann—simple curiosity. It had been a fairly odd day so far and I wondered if this series of coincidences might come together and add up to something. That's the writer—we hate loose ends.

It was a long dark place, the walls layered with old-time college pennants and programs and posters and photos of ancient warriors and jousts. A few business types were perched here and there at the near end of the bar. At the far end was a slim guy in a charcoal jacket who had whitish hair, a neat black mustache, and a stylishly arched nose. He was easily the most distinguished-looking dude in the dump. Nobody else remotely in his class. Least of all me.

I flopped on a stool a few away from him. He gave me a glance and went back to gazing at the bottles on the back bar. He looked like he was seeing through them, to another vision. I noticed that his right-hand fingers lightly strummed the stem of the wide-bowled glass in front of him. His eyebrows were drawn in a slight, distinguished-looking frown.

The bartender left off gabbing with two porky capitalists halfway down the bar and came over and took my order for a highball.

I turned partway on my stool toward Hadley, if this were indeed he, and observed, "Nice day." He shifted his near eye to me without moving his profile, then returned it to the back bar.

"I've been down by the pier."

He turned his head and gave me a long observation. I saw a tanned face, lean taut cheeks, cool grey eyes. Observation concluded, I got the profile again.

"It's a nice town. I'm thinking of taking in a movie tonight. Know anything good on?"

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Still face front, he said in a superbly chilled voice, "If you don't mind—"

"Not at all. I like to sit alone too, and work out problems. I'm a mystery writer. I've got an idea for a plot. A guy wants to zap his ex-wife because she's a big financial drain. She plays around a lot, so there are lots of men in her life. So the guy knows there'll be a slew of suspects after she's killed. You with me so far?"

He was full-face to me again. The chilled voice said, "What in the name of hell are you babbling about?"

"Like I said, I'm a mystery writer." I gave him my name. "You're Brad Hadley, aren't you?"

In this case, silence meant assent.

I took a slug from my highball. "This plot—it's kind of tricky. It starts in a theater parking lot. I have to work out the bugs—that's why I'm talking about it."

"I don't give one solitary rat's foot for your bugs." I got the profile again, but just before he turned I thought I saw a quiver in the cool grey eyes.

I admit it—I felt excitement. I hadn't started this conversation with any plan in mind—one word followed another—but they seemed to be having an effect. It isn't often I get to rattle the cage of a superior type like Brad Hadley—I don't have the suave for it. I thought I'd push this as far as it would go.

I said, "The story begins with the guy driving his ca , which is a tan Olds, to a theater parking lot, parking, buying his ticket, going in with the crowd, then immediately sliding to the side, joining the flow coming out, and walking across the lot to where a red Pinto is waiting. It's his girl friend's car, and this meeting is by prearrangement.

"They drive to the guy's ex-wife's neighborhood and the girl friend parks around the block. He walks back to the ex's house and rings the bell and she lets him in and he shoots her. He hurries out the back door and through her yard into the street behind. The girl drives up in her car—and if anyone saw the Pinto in the neighborhood it won't be tied to him because the girl-friend is from out of town and even his best friends don't know her. What do you think of this so far?"

He sat still. His cheek didn't look so taut now—it showed a little sag. It had showed it since my first mention of the Pinto. He was breathing through his mouth. The profiled eye had an odd shine, which could mean something or nothing. It could mean fright.

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I shot a glance down the bar. The bartender and the tycoons were deep in a discussion of current fiscal policies of the government, which they deemed lousy. No one was hearing us or noticing us.

Hadley said in a thin voice, still looking ahead, "Who are you?"

"I told you. A fiction writer, working on a plot. I have the guy kill the ex-wife—let's call her Ann—with a shot in the heart, then in the head. He uses a .22 pistol, and when he leaves the girl friend the gun is in her glove compartment."

This distinguished-looking man caved in. Very suddenly, and much more than I'd even hoped for. Shoulders sagged, head sagged, nicely arched nose came down close to the bar. He'd been shot down. It was the .22 that did it.

On the verge of passing out, he got life back in him. Shaky hands went to his face. He breathed very hard. He raised his head a little, took his right hand from it, and twisted his neck to look at me. The shine in his eyes was more a slime. He whispered something I couldn't make out.

I said, "Don't take this too hard. It's just a story idea. It came to me in a dream."

He was using his left hand to push his head back up. He took deep breaths.

I went on, "The theater alibi isn't too hot, but it's not bad—the guy's Olds is there in the parking lot, probably wouldn't be noticed, but nobody could say it *wasn't* there during the time he'll claim to have been seeing the picture. And he has his ticket stub. After the murder, the girl friend drives him back to the theater, killing time so they get back just as it lets out, and he walks over and joins the crowd coming out, goes to his Olds, and drives home. As I say, there's nothing clever about it, but it's serviceable. And the main point is that anybody else could have gone to his ex's place and shot her—an angry boy friend, a wife—so the whole focus doesn't have to be on him. And there's no focus at all on his girl friend—no one in town even knows her."

My glass was empty. I waved, caught the bartender's eye. He came over. I nodded to my glass and said, "And another for Mr. Hadley."

He shook it off. He hadn't touched his margarita since I'd sat down. He was back from collapse now, sitting straight, his cheeks tight again and his eyes clear of the slime.

I got my new drink, took a belt, and waited for him to say something.

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It was said very low.

"Whoever you are, this is all just—fantasy."

"Of course it is."

"This whole thing has been ridiculous."

"I haven't even reached the ridiculous part. Imagine that the guy took in the movie the night before, knowing he's bound to be questioned about it—and after seeing it he's tense, full of his plan of murder, and goes to a bar to have a few drinks. Sits by the fire. Other people are sitting there—including a young guy who's well potted, who just happens to have a wife also named Ann . . . Coincidence? This whole plot stinks of coincidence.

"The first guy looks at the fire, goes over his plan of how he's going to kill *his* Ann the next night, thinks to himself, Tomorrow we finish Ann, looks in the fire, visualizing how things are going to happen. His thoughts flow into the fire and whirl around in the haze."

He was watching me with that shine in his eyes. I took another swallow of my drink. "The drunk young guy is gazing at the fire. His head is foozled. Maybe he has little warm thoughts of Ann—*his* Ann. And the thoughts in the fireplace whirl around and maybe get confused, disoriented. They whirl around and some of them come whirling into the foozled head of the snockered man. Is that possible? How do you know it isn't? . . . And later that night or next morning those thoughts turn into pictures, pictures of the plan to kill Ann, the *other* Ann, turn into a dream—and words. Tomorrow we finish Ann. Ridiculous?"

I gave a sudden loud laugh and the bartender and his big-money friends looked over, startled and annoyed. "Tell me about ridiculous! What's more ridiculous than that?"

I drank some more.

He picked up his glass, took a sip. I had his profile again. He looked almost as distinguished as when I'd come in. He said in the chilled voice, "I don't know what you hope to gain by this story."

I set down my empty glass, got off the stool. "Keep on paying the support money. And if anything happens to her you'll see how fast we turn up your girl friend and her red Pinto. Along with proof of her purchase of a .22."

I looked at him as much as possible like I thought a smooth-bore city detective would look at a guy he was pressuring, turned, dropped a buck on the counter, flipped the bartender a two-finger wave, and paddled on out . . .

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Which proves I'm as klutzy plotting real events as mystery stories. Because if I'd had a grain of sense I'd have wheedled Ann Hadley's address from Brad so I could have swung my flab over there and bragged how I'd saved her from being murdered tonight, which might have earned me some sign of favor.

But I'd neglected to do it—so the day kind of petered out.

I got back to Lisa's block and Gruycker's Toyota was in front of a house, in the drive of which was a Chev station wagon. Which meant Ann Gruycker was back home and he'd convinced her and probably himself that the dream and what he'd said in his sleep were the result of boozing it up at The Anchor, which was true, and that he had a drinking problem, probably true too—and that he'd work on it and things would work out. Which might or might not be true. But who was I to bring wild and confusing new thoughts into their picture? Young marrieds have enough down-to-earth problems without throwing them slants from the twilight zone.

Lisa was home. Heather crowed at me. I swung her around a little. Greg wasn't home from work yet.

Lisa said, "We went to L.A. and had a good day with Germer." That's Lisa's grandmother, my ex-mother-in-law, who hates me. Good perception.

"Good." I slung Heather to the ceiling, luckily caught her before she landed. She whooped, wanting more of it, but I told her to get lost. She did, going out in the front yard where she walked around with her fat hands flat on the grass, looking at bugs upside down.

Lisa said, "Want a beer?"

"Sure."

"What'd you do today?"

"I went to the pier. Talked to a pretty woman."

"Who?"

"Ann Hadley."

"I don't know her. What's she like?"

"Pretty, in a slumpy way. Has a nifty little mole on her upper lip."

"Going to see her again?"

"If I get lucky. After she left I went to a bar downtown, had a couple of highballs, tried to work out a murder plot."

"How'd it go?"

"Lousy. Too much coincidence, fantasy, general ridiculousness. And in the end nothing happens—nobody gets murdered, there's no clean solution, just a lot of loose ends. Including a beautiful wicked

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woman I don't know anything about—even her name."

"Names are easy enough. And maybe you could tidy up the plot."

"No, it's too shaky—won't stand being worked over. If I write it at all I'll probably just lay it out bang-bang-bang, the way it came to me."

"It might turn out good."

"I doubt it . . . Wasn't something said about a beer?"

DETECTIVERSE

HOW SOON WE FORGET

by LOIS C. SURBER

Thirty days hath September.
(What should I remember?)
Take Satsuma to the vet?
(Not time for his booster yet.)
Did I forget a special date?
(A birthday present for my mate?)
Something's nagging at my brain.
(A lovely haunting old refrain?)
What is it I must do?
Lord! I forgot to renew
My yearly subscription to "Ellery Queen,"
My most beloved magazine!

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DEPARTMENT OF THIRD STORIES

We described Clements Jordan's first story—"Mr. Sweeney's Day," in our issue of December 1979—as "an exceptional debut in print." Her second story—"Poor Miss Lettie," in our issue of July 23, 1980—had "a striking sense of time and place and the human condition." You will find her third story equally sensitive, equally full of marvelously true detail . . .

WHAT HAPPENED BEFORE

by CLEMENTS JORDAN

Axie turned on her side so she could study Candy in the mirror without Candy knowing it. She was not surprised to see Candy with mother's binoculars trained out the window. It was just like something Candy would do—always peeping and spying on people on the beach. Evidently something pleased her for she got that silly smirk on her face. Putting down the binoculars, she opened her drawer, took out a pair of white shorts, and put them on.

Axie had to close her eyes to slits because now Candy crossed the room and began to twist and turn in front of the mirror. She tried on a red polkadot halter which she tied tightly. She stretched her arms above her head and looked closely. Slowly she turned to profile, scrutinizing herself. Frowning, she pulled the halter over her breasts, tucking it down so that a roll of curve showed. Dissatisfied, she removed the halter, put on a pink one, and repeated the process. She kept this one on and lovingly brushed her sun-bleached hair. Then, looking in the mirror, she walked to the door, trying to get a view of herself walking away.

"Don't sprain yourself," jeered Axie.

This remark obviously did not deserve an answer. Candy merely contented herself with a vulgar sign and left the room, slamming the door.

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Axie sprang out of bed and taking the binoculars, turned them in the direction Candy had looked. Candy's boy friend, DeWitt, was on the beach waiting for her, running in and out against the tide. He was a gorgeous example of perfect tanning and bleaching, but Axie was pretty sure he was not Candy's interest. She swept the binoculars farther along and saw the jogger in dark glasses and visored cap turn and begin to jog back down the beach. He cantered up and sank into the beach chair outside his cabin.

Axie understood a lot now. Candy might have fooled mother last night when she pretended to be watching TV in the lobby, but Axie knew she couldn't have seen the TV from the angle her head was turned. The jogger was good-looking—for his age, Axie thought—although he didn't have a bit of tan.

"A single? All by yourself?" Mrs. Cawthorne had asked genially when he arrived. Stupid, Axie had thought—anybody renting a single room would have to be by himself. Then she realized her mother was fishing for information. She didn't get it though.

"Yep," the man in dark glasses had answered briefly, but with a flashing white smile.

"Well, you're in luck, considering you don't have a reservation. There's a nice cabin next door, right on the front—number 29." She handed him a key and he had left with a flip of his hand.

Candy had leaned forward eagerly. Sometimes she or Axie was told to take towels, ice, or some other necessity to a guest's room. They were allowed to keep whatever tips they got. Mrs. Cawthorne, new to the business this season, pressed her daughters into service with the understanding that every penny must be scraped, so they must not expect wages. Maybe next summer. As it was, plenty of sun, swimming, and free time—why, people considered those a vacation.

"Sure, if you're crazy about dirty sheets and cleaning up after drunks," Candy had muttered. Mrs. Cawthorne had only one maid and a night man and often looked pale and pulled apart. Noticing the expectancy on her older daughter's face after the man left, she said, "His room's all ready. If he wants anything, let him call in." Evidently he had been satisfied. There had been no call.

Candy had said nothing about him but nobody had to poke Axie in the eye with a sharp stick. Not after all these years of being Candy's tag-along sister.

She now slowly removed her pajamas, eyeing her meager body in the mirror with bitterness. She picked up Candy's discarded halter

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and tried it on just as she had the week before. It still wrapped around her twice. Candy had interrupted her then and said derisively, "Get yourself some Band Aids. That's all you need."

"You didn't look any better than me when you were eleven, I bet."

"I've always looked better than you and I always will."

"Anyway, I've never called myself something dumb like Candy. You think it's glamorous, but other people think it's stupid."

Candy had smiled in her superior way. "Anybody named Claudia has to do the best she can. Alexandra is a better name to shorten or you'd have to scrounge around for a decent name too. Besides, mine suits me." And, Axie thought reluctantly, it did. Heads swiveled when Candy walked by.

Axie sighed and put on shorts and a T-shirt. If she was quiet going down the steps, she could get outside and speak to DeWitt alone and maybe, just maybe, he'd notice—

Mrs. Cawthorne was straightening the lounge and arguing with Candy, so Axie did not have to scrunch down on the stairs. "You are not going out there until you fix that top the way it's supposed to be."

"It *is* the way it's supposed to be."

"Claudia, I've got eyes. You are not budging until you pull that top all the way up. Then you'd better eat and wash the dishes. It's almost nine and I'll have to open up in here. Call Axie."

Axie fled. She puffed up to DeWitt and stooped as if to pick up a shell. "Hey! Where's Candy?"

"Mama might not let her come out. She won't fix her clothes decent and Mama keeps reading in the paper about what happens to girls who expose themselves, so maybe—"

"You're weird! Sounds like you've been watching late TV."

"No, there's stuff in the paper, really. There was this girl went on the beach late, just to walk around, and they found her strangled and molested and everything. And Mama says Candy can't go anywhere after ten o'clock and she better mind how she dresses too."

"You're crazy," he retorted and sprinted down in front of the office window to peer inside.

Axie walked disconsolately back, knowing that ahead of her were breakfast, wiping dishes, and everything else her mother could think of. DeWitt would never—

"Say, aren't you the little girl I saw in the lounge last night?" The voice came from under the visored cap and dark glasses of the man in the beach chair.

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"Yes, sir."

"Where's the ice machine? I've looked everywhere."

"We don't have one yet. Maybe next summer, Mama says. I can bring you a pitcher of cubes."

"You do that. I'm going inside. Bring it there."

"Yes, sir." With any luck that would be a quarter.

Candy poked her head out the door and called sweetly, "Say, Axie, Mother wants you."

"I'm coming right now." Axie did not mention the ice. It would be just like Candy to run and fetch it herself. Axie went into the kitchen, grabbed a pitcher, filled it quickly with the ice cubes they had to keep making in the freezer, and left by the kitchen door that was just a few steps from his cabin. She knocked.

He opened the door wide enough to admit her and she set the pitcher on his bedside table.

"Your mother run this place all by herself?"

"Well, Candy and I help and we've got a maid and a man on duty from eleven to three at night."

"Where's your father?"

"Mama's divorced. It's better to be by ourselves than live in a continuous argument, you know."

"Oh, yes, I can see that." He reached in his pocket for a quarter. He looked at her, grinned, and added a dime.

"Thanks. If you call in for anything, ask for me. My name's Axie and Candy always tries to get ahead of me."

"We won't let her get away with that, will we?"

"No, sir," answered Axie happily. She stood on one thin leg to scratch a mosquito bite with her other foot and tried to think of something else to do for this wondrous being who favored her over Candy.

"Say, maybe I could wash your car if you tell me which one." Candy, with DeWitt's help, had done that once and made $3.00.

"No, no, not that. I mean, maybe before I go. This phone isn't connected with outside, is it? No? Well, tell you what. How about taking my slacks to the cleaner's for me this afternoon? Our secret. We won't mention it to Candy." He winked.

"You bet," agreed Axie. She sensed there was nothing else she could do now and hurried to the kitchen before Candy began looking for her and muscling in. She had poured a glass of milk and put two pieces of bacon with congealed grease on a slice of bread when her mother came in.

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"We certainly are getting a late start today. Where have you been?"

"I just took a man a pitcher of ice. He asked for it."

"Well, that's nice. Now finish up the dishes and wipe the stove. I'm going to open the office. You help Ethel first this morning."

That pig, Candy! Axie just bet she wouldn't come back till ten o'clock when people would be up and wanting all kinds of things—ice, maps, newspapers, directions. But now the early risers were on the beach and Mama would want her to help Ethel clean their rooms. She would empty ashtrays and waste baskets, strip beds, dust furniture, put out towels and soap—and not a tip in sight. But this afternoon, when she took the slacks to the cleaners, maybe he'd give her fifty cents. She clinked her dime and quarter together. Maybe she'd have enough for a bike by school time.

Returning with Ethel, she saw the *DO NOT DISTURB* sign on his door. What was his name anyway? She would take a look in the register book and surprise him by knowing it. Find out where he lived too. That was the way to get tips—the personal touch.

It was now 10:30 and the next cleaning shift was eleven o'clock—checkout time. Ethel would be taking a break now and "getting off her poor feet." It would be Candy's turn to help clean and Axie's to try her luck in the lobby. By 12:30 things would be slack and stay that way until four or five o'clock, when new people would check in and others would straggle back from the beach to bathe and dress for the evening's doings.

Axie answered two calls for ice and got 25 and 15 cents. A late riser called and wanted a newspaper brought to him for which he tipped her a measly dime. Candy had watched a child on the beach while his mother made a phone call and got 50 cents. She had gone for sandwiches for someone—another 50 cents. And lots of ice calls. Furthermore, Axie knew DeWitt had gone everywhere with her. Candy was smart all right.

Axie peeped into the register while Mother was ringing up money for postcards—D. Samson in 19, from Massachusetts, a long way from home. It was after lunch before Axie wandered out to the parking area to find his car. There was so much mud on his license plate, she almost missed it. It sure needed washing and would be worth every penny of $3.00.

She walked back by his door. The sign was gone, so she knocked.

"There you are, in good time," he grinned. He drew the suitcase

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out of his closet, opened it, and removed the slacks. "Tell the cleaner your old man cut himself shaving and got blood on his slacks," he said with twinkling eyes.

"Yes, sir, I'll bring the ticket right back."

"Tell you what. You keep the ticket and bring the slacks back tomorrow. Here"—he reached into his pocket and handed her a dollar. "Tomorrow there will be more where this came from."

"Yes, *sir!*" she agreed, dazzled. "Say, I'm not busy. I could wash your car. It needs it real bad—"

"Hey, what do you know about my car?"

"I passed it in the parking lot. It's blue and it's from Massachusetts, Mr. Samson."

A frown that frightened her appeared and disappeared, replaced by a smooth mask, then the white-toothed grin. "Say, you are a sharp one."

"I can do a good job. I might be little but—"

He looked her over slowly and his eyes warmed. "Little is nice," he said. "If I get my car washed, you'll be the one. I mean it. But I'll tell you when, huh?"

"Yes, sir, it's a deal. I'll do a good job and cheap too."

"We won't quarrel about that. When you get back, how about some ice?"

Back in the kitchen, she found her mother and Candy arguing so heatedly that they paid no attention when she got the ice. "Claudia, I don't care if you *can* buy it with your own money. You are *not* going to get one of those string bikinis. String bikinis! You might as well be nude!"

"I might as well be *dead* for all you care! You see those bikinis everywhere. They'll notice me because I *don't* have one."

"You are not even sixteen yet. You've got to dress like a decent girl your age ought to—"

Axie escaped with the ice. Mr. Samson received it and reached into his pocket. Now Axie was embarrassed. She had cost him a lot today. "That's all right. Don't give me any more."

"Sure, I will. Bet Candy would take it. Here." He took her hand and held it while he put 35¢ into it and folded her fingers over it. "I always treat my little girls right."

Axie looked radiantly at him and mentally added up the day's take. $1.70 from him plus the other money—over $2 and probably more to come in the evening rush.

She decided to walk a little and see if DeWitt was around. He was

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sitting on the sand looking moodily at the water breaking over his feet. As Axie plopped down, he looked up eagerly, then said, "Oh, it's you."

"Thanks a lot. I like you too."

"No offense. Where's Candy? I've been waiting out here for ages."

"Fussing with Mama like always."

"Takes more than one to fuss. Why do you folks give Candy such a hard time?"

"For her own good. You ought to hear what she wants to wear now."

"Talking about me I see." Candy was suddenly there. "I'm beginning to feel surrounded. Why can't Mother spend some of her fuss time with you? She never picks on you."

"I never worry her," Axie explained virtuously.

Candy had sat down by DeWitt. He put his arm around her. "Block 'em out, babe," he comforted her.

Axie felt invisible. She wandered away to take another look at the car from Massachusetts. Candy would sure do a number when Axie got to wash that car. She scratched a little mud off the license plate and went around to the driver's side. The rest of the car wasn't so dirty. It would be easy to clean. She peered through the window and saw the newspaper on the front seat. Its headlines said something about a child who had been assaulted. The paper was folded in quarters, so she couldn't read it all—not that she wanted to. It was a Massachusetts paper and she felt disappointed that anyone so sensible as her new friend would want to read about all that stuff.

In the lounge she listlessly turned on the TV. The three o'clock news was talking about a child rapist who was last seen, it was thought, driving a light-blue 1975 Buick. Axie thought she just might scream if she heard that word again. She relaxed only when her favorite soap opera came on—a story about a plain, good girl and her beautiful but selfish and vain sister. She watched it, her eyes wet with empathy.

Her mother called that she ought to be out in the sun, but did not press the matter. She was reading the confession magazine she had so little time for. They were interrupted only twice, once by a lady buying postcards, and once by a guest asking directions. One time Axie had to leave her beautiful people to sweep the sand out of the lobby. Not a single tip.

Then came the rush. The lobby filled with people full of wants. "I'll take these cards." "I'll take this large shell and two little pink

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ones." "When does the evening paper come?" "Where is a nice reasonable place to eat?" "I'll take these magazines, please."

Tips would be scarce now. Shortly everyone would be going to supper down the beach where they could get cold drinks and souvenirs. Mrs. Cawthorne looked up from the register triumphantly to announce her luck. Every room was filled. This meant they would have their special treat—supper at Sam's Seafood Restaurant. Mrs. Cawthorne flashed on the *NO VACANCY* sign and locked up.

They had given their orders when they saw Mr. Samson rise and go to the front to pay his check. Candy saw him first. "*He* hasn't been on the beach since early morning. He's been in his room all day with the Don't Disturb sign out and hasn't called for a thing."

That's all you know, thought Axie.

"That's his privilege," pointed out Mrs. Cawthorne.

"He looks white as an oyster shell. He'd be good-looking if he had a tan and took off that silly cap."

"Claudia, never mind what he does or how he looks as long as he pays his bill. Let's eat. I've got to get back and fix the vegetables for tomorrow. We can't eat out every day, you know." They knew. Mother worried even when everything was fine.

They walked back to the office in the twilight. Candy went behind the counter while Mrs. Cawthorne and Axie shelled limas, scrubbed carrots, and washed tomatoes and cucumbers to put in the crisper. They went back to the office to release the joyful Candy to DeWitt who had come inside and leaned over the counter to gaze adoringly at her.

"DeWitt, Clau-er-Candy must be back by ten. Remember, I'm depending on you because I know I can trust you."

"Sure, Mrs. Cawthorne. She'll be back."

The lobby was silent. Mrs. Cawthorne stood poised behind the counter, looking toward the screen door that had closed behind Candy. A crease appeared between her eyes.

"Mama, do you think I'll be better looking sometime?"

"You look all right. Just fine," replied Mrs. Cawthorne absently. She slumped to the stool and propped her chin on her hand. "Looks are more trouble than anything else," she added.

Axie went slowly over to turn on the TV. Tomorrow he'd probably pay her 50¢ to return the slacks. She couldn't expect another dollar. She would not mention the car tomorrow, but the day after she might sort of hint about it. She got two more calls for ice and one asking for a new light bulb. But when she arrived with one, they

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found the lamp had been unplugged and worked okay and no mention was made of giving her anything for her trouble. Resentfully she sped back to her program.

It was past ten o'clock now and her mother was watching the clock. No Candy. Mrs. Cawthorne crossed the room, opened the screen, and peered up and down the beach. She made two more of these trips and it was after 10:30 when Candy returned. White-lipped, Mrs. Cawthorne tossed her head to do battle when the phone rang.

"Who? Axie? Oh, yes, she can bring you some ice. Certainly."

"I'll take them some. Who wants it?" asked Candy swiftly.

"He asked for me," said Axie, hurrying to the kitchen.

Mrs. Cawthorne confronted Candy. "You'll go nowhere but to bed, young lady. You broke your promise to me and we will talk some more about that in the morning—you can depend on that. Thank goodness, I've got one daughter I don't have to worry about. If I thought she'd grow up to worry me the way you do, I wouldn't want her to get any older—"

Axie hastened out with the ice.

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 561st "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . in its own way, a kind of riddle story . . .

The author, Julie Theriot, is twelve years old—no, that is not a typographical error. In a letter dated February 16, 1980, Julie Theriot wrote: "I am twelve years old and in the eighth grade. I live with my mother, father, sister, and pet parakeet. My hobbies include fortunetelling, writing, and, of course, reading, especially Agatha Christie, John Dickson Carr, and Ellery Queen." What can we expect from Julie Theriot in years to come? We look forward eagerly to her second story . . .

OVER THE EDGE

by JULIE THERIOT

I'm different from the others, and I often pity them. They don't have any faces. They look totally blank and mindless. They are recognized only by their numbers and colors. I'm one of the luckier ones because I have a face. My face isn't exactly handsome and is continuously laughing, even when I'm not happy, but it's still a face. There is only one other like me in our world. We both have the same laughing, teasing face and the same clothes.

But my twin and I aren't the only ones with faces. There are twelve others. Their faces are much handsomer than ours, and they are wearing rich, fancy clothes. But even though my face isn't the best, I do have a face and I'm glad of it.

I think that my twin and I are the luckiest of the lot, not only because we don't need colors or numbers to tell who we are, but also because we are called upon to work less often.

You see, there are some strange forces which seem to govern our lives. We don't understand them at all. They sometimes force our comrades to work while my twin and I just look on.

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Sometimes I wonder if there are others like us in this world. There are only fifty-four of us, and that doesn't seem like very many. Once I asked my twin about it, and he just said, "Don't worry about it! We are all here, and there are the forces to worship, and nothing else matters." I wish I could dismiss it as easily as he does.

Right now the forces are making the others work. My twin and I are, as usual, just looking on. A force has transported us to this plateau. Five of the gigantic, ectoplasmic apparitions that we've come to recognize as forces are gathered around the plateau. There is a curious haze in the air that is irritating my eyes. It seems to come from some long, fat, brown things that the forces have where their mouths ought to be. There are piles of lifeless round things next to each of the apparitions. Each force is holding, let's see, five of my comrades, and the rest of my comrades are waiting all together for their turns. They seem to do the same work in the same way every time we are brought here, but I wish I knew just *what* the forces are trying to accomplish.

This seems as if it has gone on forever, with the others being treated roughly and working so hard, and yet my twin and I are just sitting here, watching. It seems so futile. Yes, futile! This plateau is surrounded by precipices that go down, down, down. I am near one of them. It would not be too hard . . .

A card, one of the unused jokers, flutters to the floor.

"Q"

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 562nd "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . a tale of comeuppance . . .

The author, Dan Callard, is in his late thirties. He teaches English at the Community College of Philadelphia, and he particularly admires the "craftsmanship of Ray Bradbury and Stanley Ellin." In his own stories he hopes to draw on the West Virginia of his childhood, on East Africa where he first worked as a teacher, on the streets of Philadelphia, and on England where he often visits his wife's family. He has only one hobby—"carpentering about the house" . . .

THE SUPERCILIOUS TOURIST

by DAN CALLARD

"Not a bad ol' sunset," said Scott, with a tinge of appreciation in his otherwise contemptuous American voice.

"No, not for Derbyshire," replied his tour guide, Angus Marsden, whose 12 Yankee charges were quite reasonable—save for this obnoxious specimen. They had been doing Marsden's Gilt-Edged Safari—up into Scotland, then a leisurely glide through the North, a nip into mid-Wales, with an extra day or so here in Marsden's home county, then plunging south for a hectic mixture of antique shops, village markets, and the whole London scene. The tour had not been going well, and this rotten apple was to blame.

"Face it, ol' buddy, you just don't have the scope here, the sweep of, say, a Texas sundown, but—"

"But it will do in a pinch. Good. And how was the leg of mutton?"

The leg of mutton didn't compare, of course, with a rib-eye steak Scott had had in Laredo. Then, for a tedious week, Marsden and Scott's compatriots had learned that English towns ought to be rebuilt "to make way for the traffic," were "sleepy" because you

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couldn't get a meal after six, and that English houses were badly designed because the doorways were "real headbangers." Scott was well over six feet tall, and had come to grief a few days before on the lintel of a Welsh cottage. "Who built this—dwarfs?" he asked.

"Look, you've got to accept us as we are, Mr. Scott. Not as you'd like us to be," said Marsden afterward.

"I do, I do, Ang, and you guys come up short even when I lower my standards. But I won't complain, ol' buddy. I'm having a heck of a time. And it's all in here," he added, with a twinkle in his jaundiced eye as he patted a camera around his neck.

"I'm sure it is." Angus Marsden pondered giving his "When in Rome" lecture, but decided not to. It would be like water off a duck's back. And, after all, he thought, maybe it's I who am intolerant.

But it wasn't. Scott was leaving a rude swath of complaints up and down the British landscape, from Ilkley Moor to Stonehenge. The former was "a dinky little bit of scrub," and the latter was "disappointing." One innkeeper had complained to Marsden: "I don't care how bleeding much money they bring in here, I'm not bedding and boarding chaps who insult my customers in the dining room. You can go elsewhere with 'em, Angus, thank you very much."

Will no one rid me of this boorish Yank, thought Marsden. He felt the press of this insolent weight on his own neck, and his business sense told him that only he could lift it. Finally Scott's own countrymen began to grumble about him to Marsden. Something clearly had to be done.

Angus Marsden was stumped. In all his 20 years of coach-tripping he hadn't been faced with quite such a despicable person as Scott. He surpassed even the unfair stereotype of the loud, brash, rich Yank. Marsden thought of himself as a dedicated guide, having spent years studying Americans, their wants and needs. He had really catered to them—his livelihood depended on it. He had felt he knew them through and through, from the busloads of timid midwestern schoolteachers to the street-wise New Yorkers and the mellow Californians. He could handle them all, and somehow he would have to handle this one.

They were back in London for six days, where their schedule was to be a tight and expensive array of shows and restaurants. "Just don't lay any English grub on us, Ang," Scott said loudly, as they were filing out of the bus to the hotel.

It was this that did it—the last straw—because Marsden was a born-again lover of his national food, and he reacted with uncon-

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cealed nationalism that had the other Americans cheering. "Mr. Scott," he finished, "if I can't impress you with our food, perhaps a pub crawl this afternoon would impress you with our drink. Our beer's second to none. I reckon it will change your point of view."

"You're on," said a supercilious Scott.

"How about it, mates, shall we all go pub crawling and watch Mr. Scott change his attitude?" To which Marsden got a thundering yes.

By first closing time Scott had put away a pint of best bitter, cursed it for tasting bitter, and then stuck his nose into some bourbon whiskey that the barman dusted off for him. Marsden let him get well potted, then packed them all back into the coach and dropped them off at the hotel to freshen up for the dinner and play of the evening.

As was his practice, Scott stayed on the coach to browbeat his guide, this time with a tongue that seemed to get in the way of his words. Marsden deftly wheeled the coach out into the quickening traffic, listening dutifully as Scott derided the fussiness of queues and Belisha beacons. Marsden worked his way over to Curzon Street, then swung into Park Lane.

"I'm not going to the car park this time, Mr. Scott. I'm taking the coach across town for repairs. You'd best nip back to the hotel."

Scott muttered incoherently about unhygienic public loos, and lurched, blind drunk, up to the coach doors as Marsden drove boldly into the writhing traffic of Hyde Park Circus on a Friday afternoon. He breathed in the solid belt of alcohol from Scott as it knifed through the stench of petrol fumes and hot metal; then, cool as a British cucumber, he stopped the bus and let Mr. Scott step off.

"Tara, Mr. Scott. Have a pleasant stroll," he said loudly above the tumult of engines. Then he threw the stick into gear and re-entered the plunging mass. He loved it, as he eased the old coach into the heedless rush of bumpers, like a fish returning to water.

In the mirror he caught a final glimpse of the American, bunting about in the center of it all. And, to the last, he observed with utmost regret that the only time Scott looked as he tried to escape, he was looking to the left. A shame, Marsden thought, as he guided the shiny coach off into Knightsbridge toward the hypothetical garage. A shame that I could guide my groups so carefully through the difficult and delicate problems of viewpoint, and neglect the simplest, most immediate need—the need for newcomers to look to the right, not to the left, when crossing British roads. I really must remember that, next time.

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a *NEW* crime-detective story by

SEICHO MATSUMOTO

In case you missed Seicho Matsumoto's first short story to be published in the United States—"The Woman Who Took the Local Paper," in the June 1979 issue of EQMM—we repeat our introduction of Japan's Number One mystery writer:

Seicho Matsumoto is recognized and acclaimed in the East as Japan's leading mystery writer and the most important figure on the Japanese detective-story scene today. He ushered in the second period in the history of the modern Japanese detective story. The first period, called the Tantei Era, began with Edogawa Rampo and ended just before World War Two; the second period, called the Suiri Era, shifted technique from "unrealistic" puzzles to "social" detective stories; and in this second period Seicho Matsumoto was the dominant influence, as he continues to be in the current period, called the Neo-Social Era.

Mr. Matsumoto's novels, which epitomize contemporary life in Japan, are consistently among Japan's best sellers. He has published approximately 50 books, with an average sale of 400,000 copies each, 100,000 in hardcover, 300,000 in paperback. His indefatigable curiosity and his enduring passion to learn have led him recently into the world of archeology and history, and his studies of Japanese society and economy have been praised for their depth and insight.

"The Secret Alibi" is the story of a murder case in present-day Tokyo. It tells how one lie may be linked to another, in a chain as inexorable as fate . . .

"Q"

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THE SECRET ALIBI

by SEICHO MATSUMOTO

Chieko Umetani was sitting in front of the mirror putting on her makeup. The small dressing table had been bought for her the previous month by Teiichiro Ishino—in fact, he had bought all the furniture in the room. The apartment was small—it consisted of only two rooms, each about nine feet by nine; but Chieko had managed to furnish it in such a way as to create the impression of space.

It was obviously the apartment of a young person and it was painted in a warm color that always made forty-eight-year-old Ishino feel refreshed when he came there. His own house was much larger and more luxurious, but it was cold and colorless. Even when he was at home with his family, he found the lack of warm color depressing, and when he opened his eyes in the morning he felt as if all his own warmth was being sucked out of him.

Ishino changed quickly into his clothes, and lying on the floor with his head propped up with one hand, he lit a cigarette. As he lay there watching the girl in the mirror, he was struck by her youth. The clothes she wore, the way she put on her makeup, her voice—everything about her was young and fresh, a far cry from the wife who was waiting for him at home.

Chieko was in her early twenties and had worked in the same department as Ishino until about two months before. Ishino was proud of his position as a department head in the company, and not wanting to endanger his future with rumors of an illicit affair, he had persuaded Chieko to leave work soon after they had got together, and had rented this apartment for her.

Ishino lived in southern Tokyo, and when he looked for the apartment, he chose a place where no one else from the office would be likely to bump into him. He eventually found this apartment in Nishi-Okubo, to the west of Tokyo, and for his clandestine purpose it was perfect. Not only was it out of the way, but it was situated at the junction of two narrow alleyways and he could always slip in and out without being seen. Chieko had rented the rooms in her own name, and as he never visited her during the day he felt there

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was no chance he would be connected with her in any way. Chieko thought it all very amusing and told him that no one in the neighborhood so much as suspected his existence. Although the houses in Tokyo are all crowded together, the people who live in them are isolated from each other.

"I'm sorry I took so long," Chieko said. She got up and turned to Ishino with a smile. "And what excuse are you going to give your good wife this evening?"

Ishino took his hand from behind his head and looked at his watch.

"It's only nine o'clock. I'll tell her I went to a film at Shibuya—the timing is just about right."

He stood up and helped Chieko on with her coat.

"But what if she asks you about the plot of the movie?"

"The film I saw last week is still running. I'll tell her about that."

They looked at each other and started to laugh.

Chieko left the house first, and going out to the street she checked that there was no one around before giving Ishino the all-clear signal. Despite his precautions Ishino was always afraid they might be seen together, but Chieko was insistent that she at least see him to a taxi. He insisted, however, that she walk a few paces behind him, and when he hailed a taxi that she wait a short distance away in a darkened entrance. In this way, even if they happened to be seen by someone, there was nothing to connect them with each other.

The night of December the 14th was still quite warm when Ishino walked ahead of Chieko toward the busy main road about 200 yards away. He had only about 50 feet to go when suddenly a man walking in the opposite direction recognized him and bowed. Ishino panicked slightly, but as the man walked under a street light, Ishino recognized him as Kozo Sugiyama, a neighbor from Omori whom he knew only by sight. Without thinking, Ishino bowed, and instantly regretted it.

Why did I do that? he thought. I had only to ignore him and he would probably think he'd made a mistake. After all, it's night time and he wouldn't be expecting to see me here. I wonder what he was doing here at this time of night. He looks like an office worker but—oh, how annoying.

He walked into the main road and was waiting for a taxi to appear when Chieko moved up beside him and asked in a low voice, "Did you know that man?"

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She had seen their exchange of bows.

"Yes, it was one of my neighbors."

"Oh . . ." Chieko murmured. "Is it all right?"

She sounded quite worried.

"I think so."

"He won't tell your wife, will he?"

"No, we aren't really on speaking terms—we just know each other by sight."

Chieko was silent for a few moments. There was still no sign of a taxi, and Ishino was just thinking of asking Chieko to stand away from him when she said anxiously, "Do you think he guessed . . . about us?"

Ishino was startled.

"If he suspected something he might talk about it and rumors might get back to your wife."

"You were walking behind me, weren't you?"

"Yes."

"Did he look at you when he passed?"

"No, he walked straight past."

"Then there's nothing to worry about—he didn't suspect anything," said Ishino in a relieved voice.

"You're sure?"

"Yes, don't worry. But move away a bit, will you?"

Chieko walked off, her heels ringing on the pavement just as an empty taxi came down the street.

Sitting in the swaying taxi, Ishino thought back over everything Chieko had said.

"I wonder if Sugiyama will mention having seen me. If even a hint gets back to my wife, if she hears I was in Okubo with a young woman, she's sure to cause a scene. And if she makes a big enough fuss, they could learn about it at the office and I could get demoted."

Ishino put these thoughts aside, realizing it did no good to worry about them. The taxi was now speeding along the outer loop, and opening the window he let the cold night air rush in to clear his head.

He glanced at his watch as he got out of the cab in front of his home in Omori and saw that it was 9:45. As he approached the front door, the porch light came on and he heard his wife's harsh voice call out in greeting.

Looking at her fat figure, his thoughts went back to Chieko's lithe

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form, and he felt his usual depression closing in around him.

"You're late," she said as he struggled with the laces of his shoes.

"Yes, I took in a movie at Shibuya on the way home."

Ishino stepped out of his shoes and hurried through to the living room. Glancing around, he couldn't help wondering again why this house always seemed so cold and dreary. His wife came into the room carrying a kimono for him to change into.

"Would you like your dinner now?" she asked.

"No, I've eaten," Ishino answered tersely. His wife looked disgruntled, but didn't say anything more. Seeing that he was going to be left in peace, Ishino relaxed, and after having a cigarette he went to bed.

The next morning he awoke with the sunlight pouring through the thin paper sliding doors. The morning newspaper was lying by his pillow and reaching out, he picked it up and started to look through it. There was a headline:

YOUNG HOUSEWIFE MURDERED
BY ROBBER IN MUKOJIMA

The third page of the newspaper was filled with news of the murder and Teiichiro Ishino gave the story a cursory reading.

"A twenty-three-year-old housewife was attacked and strangled by a burglar while she was alone in her home in the Mukojima area. The body was discovered by her husband when he returned from work . . ."

It was quite a common story these days and Teiichiro didn't bother to read on. He closed his eyes and was just about to drop off to sleep again when he thought of Chieko alone in her apartment every day, and he couldn't help but worry.

During the next two weeks nothing out of the ordinary happened. He visited Chieko only once.

"Did that man we saw last time say anything?" she asked.

"No, it's okay. He obviously didn't notice you, so we have nothing to worry about."

For a moment Kozo Sugiyama's long thin face swam in front of his eyes.

"Now that you mention it, I haven't seen the man since then," he said almost to himself.

"That's good," Chieko said, smiling.

One day, at about three o'clock, Ishino was examining some documents when the office porter came in and told him that he had

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visitors. Looking at the card, he saw that it belonged to Inspector Tameo Okudaira of the Central Police Department. Teiichiro thought he must have come in some connection with Chieko and his face started to burn.

"There are three of them," the porter added.

Teiichiro asked him to show them into the reception room. In order to appear calm and casual he purposely took his time in going out to meet them. He found, however, that he was so upset that he could make no sense out of what he was reading, and giving it up, he hurried down to the reception room.

There were three men in plainclothes sitting along one side of the oval table. As Ishino entered, all three stood, and Teiichiro noticed that the one on the left was much older than the other two.

"Good afternoon," he said in a calm voice. "I'm Teiichiro Ishino. What can I do for you?"

"Okudaira," said the oldest of the three, bowing politely to Teiichiro.

The Inspector introduced the other two detectives, but Teiichiro immediately forgot their names. Inspector Okudaira had a square face and looked more like a merchant than a policeman. He kept smiling and chatting in a friendly way while the porter brought in the tea. Teiichiro struck a match and lit a cigarette, but not knowing why they had come to see him he couldn't relax.

"To get down to business," said Okudaira, taking out his notebook. "You live at Omori Magome, Ota-ku, don't you?" and he mentioned the street number.

"Yes, that's right," Teiichiro answered in the same calm voice, his heart beating furiously.

The detective stared at him in a most unsettling way.

What's he got written in that notebook? Teiichiro thought.

"We came here to ask you about one of your neighbors, a Mr. Kozo Sugiyama. You know him, don't you?"

Teiichiro was surprised by this turn of events, but bearing in mind their chance meeting weeks ago, he realized that he had to be careful, that he could not let down his guard.

"I know him by sight, but I don't think I have ever spoken to him."

"But you'd recognize him if you met him somewhere?"

"Yes, of course I'd recognize him," Teiichiro said, his meeting Sugiyama at Nishi-Okubo springing into his mind again. —Just what was this detective driving at?

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"In that case, I wonder if you remember having passed him in the street at Nishi-Okubo on the evening of December the fourteenth?"

So that's it, thought Teiichiro. It *was* the fourteenth.

Thinking quickly about Chieko, he realized it would be best if he denied any knowledge of having seen Sugiyama.

"Let me see . . ." he said, pretending to be searching his memory.

"What's this all about, anyway?" he asked, trying to get a clue as to what he should say.

"We're investigating a very serious case," the detective answered. "There was a murder at Mukojima at nine o'clock on the night of the fourteenth. You may have read about it in the newspapers—a young housewife was murdered.

"Well, it happens that our main suspect is Mr. Sugiyama. The evidence against him is very strong, but he claims he bumped into you on the street in Nishi-Okubo at the time in question and that if we were to ask you, you would be able to confirm it.

"Nishi-Okubo being a considerable distance from Mukojima, he couldn't possibly have been in both places at the same time and it would give him a perfect alibi. Therefore I want you to think very carefully before you answer, because you are his only witness."

Teiichiro was shocked. He couldn't think of a worse situation in which to have met Sugiyama. If he admitted having seen him, his affair with Chieko was sure to become public and the thought of what that would mean filled him with distress.

"No, I can't say that I ever saw him there," Teiichiro said clearly.

Ishino went straight home after work. He still hadn't recovered from the shock of the police coming to his office, and although he really didn't care about Sugiyama's predicament, he was worried that the police might somehow connect him with Chieko. It was almost as if it was a trap to catch him.

Why was Sugiyama a suspect in the Mukojima murder anyway? Teiichiro had certainly met him at nine o'clock, as Sugiyama had said. Sugiyama had bowed to him and without thinking, he had bowed back. All he had to do was admit this and Sugiyama would be in the clear. But if he did, his own position would be endangered. If anyone found out about Chieko, he would suffer in more ways than one. No, it was unfortunate about Sugiyama, but Teiichiro wasn't about to sacrifice his comfort and his position for another man.

His wife came to the door as he arrived.

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"You're home early today," she said.

Teiichiro gave her his briefcase and undid his shoes in silence.

"Have you heard?" she asked in her rasping voice as she followed him into the living room, "About that nice Mr. Sugiyama? They say he murdered that woman at Mukojima! Isn't it terrible?" she asked, her eyes wide with excitement.

Teiichiro wasn't sure what he should say. He remained silent.

"Although we didn't know anything about it, they say he was arrested three days ago. I was very surprised—he looks like such a quiet man. It just goes to show—you can't judge by appearances.

"The police were searching his house today and asking all the neighbors about him. They say his wife was in tears, but it's his three children I feel sorry for, you know?"

His wife was so full of the affair she was much more talkative than usual.

Teiichiro couldn't make up his mind whether to tell her about the detectives coming to his office. He thought it over while he changed, then went to join her in the kitchen. Finally he decided that in a major case like this one the police were sure to be back to check his story and she would find out anyway.

"Actually the police came to see me at the office today about it," he said in a casual manner.

His wife looked at him in amazement.

"Sugiyama claims he saw me in Nishi-Okubo at the time the murder was committed. I had no reason to be in that area, but he insists he saw me there. I suppose he hopes to save himself with lies."

"What did you tell them?" his wife asked.

"Of course I told them he was lying. I'm not going commit perjury to save someone I hardly know."

His wife nodded understandingly, then asked, "Where were you at that time?"

Her eyes seemed to flash suspiciously and momentarily he was alarmed.

"I was watching that film at Shibuya. Don't you remember, the time I was late getting home."

"Oh, yes, I remember." She nodded to herself for a few moments, then said angrily, "But why does he have to drag you into it? What has he got against you?"

"He just wants to save himself. Desperate people will say anything if they think it will save them," Teiichiro said calmly, but suddenly

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he felt cold as he realized that he was the one who was telling a lie to save himself. He was determined, however, that no one would learn the truth no matter how many innocent people he had to sacrifice. He had to look after himself first. Even if Sugiyama had noticed Chieko and told the police about her, he would stick to his story and deny all knowledge of her. If he insisted that he didn't meet anyone after he left the film, no one could prove to the contrary.

He now realized it was dangerous to leave Chieko in Nishi-Okubo and he decided to move her somewhere else.

As Teiichiro anticipated, he was called in by the police numerous times to give testimony. First, there were several visits to the investigation headquarters. Later he was summoned by the public prosecutor's office, then by the Tokyo district court, and finally by the high court.

Kozo Sugiyama had received the death sentence at the district court. He had then appealed to the high court where his sentence was upheld. Now he was appealing to the supreme court.

In the beginning Teiichiro hadn't thought his testimony would be that important to Sugiyama. He never dreamed that it would be on his testimony alone that the man would be sentenced to death. As the case progressed, however, it became obvious that Sugiyama's defense rested solely on Teiichiro's word.

If he had testified that he did meet Sugiyama at Nishi-Okubo on the night of December fourteenth, Sugiyama would surely have been acquitted. But Teiichiro never wavered. His story remained the same to the end.

As he kept repeating his story, he gradually became more proficient in telling it, until he reached the stage where he half believed that he had been at the movies on the night in question.

The victim had been attacked from behind and strangled. She had been seen at the neighborhood shops just before nine o'clock, and the body had been discovered by her husband when he came home at 9:30, placing the time of death in the thirty minutes before the body was discovered.

The inside of the house didn't seem to have been disturbed, but 500,000 yen and an expensive camera were missing. Unfortunately, however, the police were unable to find any fingerprints on the scene that didn't belong there.

As a result of their investigations, the police located the missing camera in a second-hand shop in Ueno. The person who had brought

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in the camera had filled out a receipt, and although the name and address were obviously false, his handwriting was an important piece of evidence.

While making inquiries in the neighborhood, the police learned that an insurance salesman in the area had been acting a bit suspiciously, and after checking with the insurance company Sugiyama's name had come to light.

Sugiyama had visited the victim's house several times in the past when she was alone, so he knew both her and the layout of her house. On top of this, without Ishino's corroboration, he didn't have an alibi for the time in question.

He claimed to have gone to Nishi-Okubo to visit one of his policy holders, but finding no one at home he had returned to Omori without meeting anyone else. By way of proof he claimed that he had met Teiichiro Ishino in the street, but Teiichiro had denied this.

The owner of the camera shop positively identified him as being the one who had brought in the stolen camera. First the shop owner had said that he resembled the man, but as the case continued, he became more positive in his statements.

Two handwriting experts agreed that Sugiyama's handwriting and the handwriting on the camera-shop receipt were the same.

There being no fingerprints on the scene of the crime meant that there was no clinching evidence. In addition, the police hadn't been able to find any trace of the missing 500,000 yen; they assumed that Sugiyama had managed to spend it all in the two weeks preceding his arrest. Finally, Sugiyama didn't have an alibi for the time when the camera was sold at Ueno.

So Teiichiro's evidence was of crucial importance. In fact, it was a matter of life and death for Kozo Sugiyama.

Ishino's testimony was so clear, so convincing, that no one even suspected that he was lying.

JUDGE: "Does the witness know the defendant?"

TEIICHIRO: "We're not what you would call friends, but he lives in the neighborhood and we generally exchange greetings when we pass in the street."

JUDGE: "That means you would recognize him?"

TEIICHIRO: "Yes."

JUDGE: "The defendant claims he met you at a little after nine o'clock on the evening of the fourteenth of December at Nishi-Okubo, Shinjuku. Do you have any recollection of such a meeting?"

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TEIICHIRO: "No, I never met him in that area. At the time in question I was at the theater in Shibuya watching a movie."
JUDGE: "At exactly what time were you watching this film?"
TEIICHIRO: "I was in the theater from approximately seven thirty to nine forty. It was a double bill and I saw both films before returning straight to my home in Omori."
JUDGE: "Did you meet anyone you knew at the theater?"
TEIICHIRO: "No."
JUDGE: "Approximately how many people were in the cinema that evening?"
TEIICHIRO: "I didn't take that much notice at the time, so I may be wrong of course, but I think it was quite full."
JUDGE: "Could you give the court some idea of the plots of the movies you saw?"
TEIICHIRO: "Certainly. In the first film the scene opened on . . ."

In this manner Teiichiro bluffed his way through the investigation headquarters, the district court, and the higher court without being found out. The defense counsel and the district attorney had both questioned him minutely on some points, but Teiichiro had easily managed to deceive them. He seemed almost like the captain of a ship, steering it through a storm, and the passenger on board this ship was Chieko Umetani.

The case was finally taken to the supreme court, but this didn't really make any difference to Teiichiro. By now his testimony had been taken down in writing and was on file in the courthouse. This record made his personal appearance no longer necessary, so Teiichiro was once again free to continue his life as if nothing had happened.

But he couldn't stop his conscience from troubling him.

His testimony was nothing but a chain of lies, and the judge, prosecution, and defense were just rearranging these lies to suit their purposes.

No one ever doubted his story, and the only one except Chieko who knew it was false was the defendant, Kozo Sugiyama.

But Sugiyama was not the only person who knew Teiichiro was lying. There were also some of the neighbors who lived near the murdered woman, the camera dealer, and the handwriting experts. All had lied, intentionally or not, and together had condemned an innocent man.

Teiichiro realized now that life is full of traps and one never knows

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when one is likely to be caught. In fact, he felt that it was he and not Sugiyama who was the real victim of circumstances. By being in that place at that time on that day, Sugiyama had in fact threatened Teiichiro's privacy and security. If they had never met, Teiichiro wouldn't have suffered the great stress of testifying over and over in court. If he had only stayed with Chieko for a few more minutes, or left a little earlier, or smoked one more cigarette, he would never have been seen by Sugiyama. The difference of two or three minutes, even of one minute, had changed his fate, and he couldn't help but feel how unfair it was.

He saw how the Fates wove their threads and how by falling into their pattern, one's whole life could be changed. Just thinking of it filled him with fear, and he realized how dangerous it is for men even to leave their homes and walk in the street.

A few months later an article appeared in the newspapers reporting that the final verdict on the Sugiyama murder case would be reached soon. Not having had to make any further appearances in court, Teiichiro had almost been able to forget about the case, but the months had left their mark on him.

It wasn't until the end of this time that he learned that Chieko had another, younger lover.

One day, while she was with her other lover, Chieko was reading about the Sugiyama case in the newspaper and indiscreetly had told her lover the truth about that night.

"I feel sorry for that Mr. Sugiyama, you know, he's really innocent," she had said.

When her lover asked her what she meant, she had tried to pass it off, but finally, after making him promise not to tell a soul, she had told him how Ishino really had met Sugiyama at Nishi-Okubo on the night of the murder.

The young man listened to the story in surprise and of course he hadn't been able to keep quiet about it for long. He soon told a friend, and eventually the story came to the ear of the defense counsel who promptly had Ishino charged with perjury.

The secret life that Teiichiro had tried so hard to hide suddenly came to light, and the catastrophe he had tried so desperately to avoid engulfed him.

Teiichiro hadn't had the slightest suspicion that Chieko had another lover all the time he had known her, and it was her deception, her lying to him, that led to his final doom.

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY NEWSLETTER

CRIME BEAT

by R. E. PORTER

COLLECTED EDITIONS: One of the great achievements of an author's lifetime must be the appearance of a collected edition of his work in hard covers, to take its place on the shelf beside those matched sets of Dickens and Hardy and Henry James. Very few writers in the mystery field reach this goal, especially in America. Things are better in England, partly because of the willingness of publishers there to enter into joint ventures. John Murray and Jonathan Cape teamed up to publish fourteen volumes of an Arthur Conan Doyle collected edition, with the nine Sherlock Holmes books published by Doubleday in this country.

The Greenway Edition of Agatha Christie's books has a happy history in both countries. Twenty-eight volumes have now been published by Collins in England, and that number will be matched shortly by Dodd, Mead in America when they reprint the two latest books, *Third Girl* (1966) and *Passenger to Frankfurt* (1970). Dodd, Mead has always been Christie's U.S. publisher, so no problem existed concerning rights to the books. By way of contrast, Gollancz's thirty-volume collected edition of the Ellery Queen novels has no American counterpart because those thirty novels had five different American publishers.

My favorite collected edition of a modern author identified with the suspense field is the nineteen-volume Graham Greene set published jointly in England by Heinemann and Bodley Head. Each volume contains a fascinating Introduction by Greene about the writing of that particular book. The 22-page Introduction to *The Quiet American,* for example, relates Greene's experiments with opium smoking while visiting Indo-China.

I've always regretted that these Introductions were unavailable to most American readers. Now, happily, they have been reshaped to form about half the contents of Greene's second volume of autobiography, *Ways of Escape,* which Simon & Schuster will publish here in January. It is truly a literary autobiography, dealing in depth with his books and travel rather than with his personal life. (Note to Greene collectors: The first edition of this book is neither the British nor the American one, but a Canadian edi-

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tion published this past summer by Lester & Orpen Dennys, Toronto.)

NEW MYSTERY LINE: Two famous names in publishing, one modern and the other historic, were united recently when mystery editor Joan Kahn joined Ticknor & Fields, a subsidiary of Houghton Mifflin Company. Ticknor & Fields, American publisher of Dickens, Emerson, Hawthorne, and Thoreau in the Nineteenth Century, was acquired by Houghton Mifflin in 1880, but the name had been dormant until its revival this year. Joan Kahn, who edited 17 Edgar-winning mysteries during her 35 years at Harper & Row, will launch a new mystery line under her own imprint for Ticknor & Fields, with the first titles due next year.

POE COLLECTION: If you enjoy rereading the stories of Edgar Allan Poe occasionally, you should know about a fine new paperback collection of Poe's *Selected Tales* (Oxford University Press, $4.95). The three Dupin stories and twenty other tales are included, with a new Introduction and extensive notes on each story by Julian Symons.

MYSTERY ON TV: Television's best mystery-suspense anthology series in a good many years was last season's syndicated *Tales of the Unexpected,* one episode of which won MWA's Edgar award. The first season presented nearly a score of Roald Dahl's stories, plus single tales by Saki, John Collier, and Lawrence Block, all introduced by Dahl. This fall and winter, a second series of twenty-two stories is being shown, introduced by John Houseman. Many are from *EQMM* and *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine,* including works by Stanley Ellin, Tonita S. Gardner, Brian Garfield, Edward D. Hoch, Dana Lyon, Bill Pronzini, Ruth Rendell, and Jack Ritchie.

COMING ATTRACTIONS: Scribners has a new omnibus of three P. D. James novels, *Murder in Triplicate,* out this month—plus a new paperback edition of the late C. P. Snow's first novel, *Death Under Sail* (1932), in its Scribner Crime Classics series.

The British novelist John Fowles examines a historical mystery in *The Enigma of Stonehenge,* a November title from Summit Books, with photographs by Barry Brukoff.

Edgar-winning novelist Paul Erdman returns to the world of intrigue and high finance in *The Last Days of America,* a February title from Simon & Schuster.

And though our Olympic team didn't make it to Moscow, John Putnam Thatcher obviously was on hand for the winter games. Emma Lathen's popular sleuth solves the mystery of a murdered ski jumper in *Going for the Gold,* another February novel from Simon & Schuster.

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BLOODY VISIONS

by CHRIS STEINBRUNNER

"I just steal things," explains Leslie-Anne Down offhandedly as the cool, aristocratic Gillian of *Rough Cut,* "because it's exciting and dangerous." The film is exciting and dangerous too, but like its prizes—Gillian and thirty million dollars in rough-cut diamonds—lush and sparkling as well. Burt Reynolds plays the dashing Jack Rhodes, world's top jewel thief (the character is from the Derek Lambert book, *Touch the Lion's Paw*), now "respectable" enough to mingle easily in London society—he owns a posh restaurant—who plots the ultimate heist: grabbing a huge gem shipment going by air from London to Antwerp. Falling into his scheme is Gillian, daughter of a British politician who uses her social invitations to indulge in wild kleptomania (earrings, sports cars, *anything!).* This is a matched pair, carefully eyed by Scotland Yard Inspector David Niven, who very much wants them to be safely locked away.

The ever urbane Niven's ambition is to trap Rhodes in a major diamond robbery before he must retire from the Yard in a matter of weeks. So he blackmails Gillian into cooperating with him in exchange for secrecy about her own foibles—of which he is well aware. ("Women's prisons," he sighs to her, "they're all really poisonously unpleasant.") Niven has almost a feverish attitude against gem theft: "The greatest crime of all is the violation of property—especially diamonds, the most direct link we have to the core of the planet itself." So as the merry diamond thieves—who are hip enough to pass themselves off as the ever-present, ever-active drug smugglers "so as not to arouse suspicion"—go about their plans they are being closely watched.

Nothing really has been this much fun in a caper film since the golden days back at Ealing Studios. Our superbly confident Raffles flits to Paris and Berlin to recruit his ragtag accomplices: an amiable ex-Nazi who runs a flying museum and who in this plot will pilot a plane across the Channel ("This time, try not to strafe the civilians") and a Left Bank jazz pianist who, listening to the setup, plays *Ain't Misbehavin'* with a truly wicked glint in his eye. The banter is brisk and beautiful: at one point Niven is allowed to sniff archly, referring to his old friend's erring daughter, "I've known Gillian since she was a little girl, stealing around the house." The climax—the heist itself—involves two jet carriers, as much misdirection as a magicians' convention, and is hilarious, followed by a satisfying epilogue surprise in the South Seas. (I do not give too much away by noting the South Seas are all good thieves' ultimate destination.)

Reynolds here plays a Cary Grant caper role with aplomb, to the manor born, switching from the good ol' boy bandits he's done in the past. He has

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made contributions to our genre, in point of fact: the ill-fated detective in the grim *Hustle*, a cop in *Fuzz*, and on televison the hero of the crime series *Hawk* and *Dan August*. In *Rough Cut* he is even more dapper than ever before, and can bring his easy grace to the Jack Rhodes part again. David Niven has of course played *Raffles* himself (in 1940) as well as one of the chief rogues of *The Rogues* television series, a wonderful, sophisticated caper show Raffles would no doubt have been overjoyed to watch. His most recent mystery credits include the elegant Nick Charles spoof in *Murder by Death* and Poirot's friend in *Death on the Nile*. He here joins the ranks of the Yard with determination and skill.

But the most arresting talent in *Rough Cut* is its director, Don Siegel, who for decades has been known as master of the tough little crime film, tense and violent (including the two best prison dramas ever made, *Riot in Cell Block 11* and *Escape from Alcatraz),* but here delights with a glossy romantic caper sans violence nor a dot of blood. Siegel's melodrama credits deserve far more attention than this space can give them. Among his earliest films are *The Verdict,* in which a Scotland Yard inspector (Sidney Greenstreet) plots the perfect crime, and the legendary *Invasion of the Body Snatchers,* as well as such gritty crime dramas as *Crime in the Streets* and *Baby Face Nelson* (starring the baby-faced Mickey Rooney). Clint Eastwood played cop for him in *Coogan's Bluff* and *Dirty Harry* as his career curved up from directing films with "low budgets, tight schedules, and performers just below star level"—films with an uncompromising, *cinema verité* look that has made him be thought of as a European rather than an American director in cult circles, although he is unquestionably the latter. Now he has at last been allowed to rough-cut loose in a sparkling romantic comedy, and the results are infectious. At one point a gang-member remarks admiringly of the effervescent Rhodes, "The man's a natural high," and the same can be said of the film.

Rough Cut is prime cut.

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INTERVIEW: RUTH RENDELL (2)

This is the conclusion of an interview that began in the previous issue.

EQMN: You raise readers' consciousness about countless things—travel, poetry, the visual and performing arts, Mother Nature, human nature, etc. How do you find the time to write as prolifically as you do and still enjoy so many other things in depth as you do? How do you set your priorities?

RENDELL: I don't set any priorities about writing and other interests except that writing is my work and my living and I work at it every day for the morning and some of the afternoon. Of course I'm glad I read

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so many really heavy books when I was young—they didn't seem heavy then—for I certainly shouldn't embark on *Religio Medici* or *Thus Spake Zarathustra* now. I'm blessed, luckily, with an excellent memory. Memory really is all with me, having a nice little poetry computer for a brain, for when once I worked out my IQ it came to 89.

I think another answer about how I find time is that I'm a naturally busy, speedy person. I never sit down and do nothing and I don't like TV.

EQMN: You've won well deserved awards from the Mystery Writers of America and the Crime Writers Association in England, but I believe you haven't been able to accept the awards in person. Does this suggest you don't value awards?

RENDELL: You're wrong about my not accepting the CWA award, the Gold Dagger, in person. I bought a new evening dress for the occasion and made my little speech and have a photograph to prove it. I also collected the *Current Crime* silver cup in person. I didn't go to New York to get my Edgar because I was going six weeks later. Oh, I do value awards. I love 'em and would like lots and lots.

EQMN: A fanciful question. Is there anyone else you'd rather be?

RENDELL: No. I hope this doesn't sound arrogant. I mean that there is no other living person I would rather be, though of course I can imagine myself much improved and certain physical and psychological changes for the better which I fear will never now take place. Now I'm middle-aged and pretty firmly established in my own identity, I feel O.K. about being a woman but I would rather have been a man from the start.

EQMN: Have there been any criminals or victims in your fiction that you have special sympathy or distaste for?

RENDELL: The truth is I never have distaste for any of my creations. Answering your question has made me realize this, I didn't know it before. They are mine and I love them. I even like Eunice Parchman *(A Judgement in Stone)* and Arthur Johnson *(A Demon in My View).* What we have made we love. I think that's generally true. My favorite of all my characters are the bizarre ones, such as the grotesquely absent-minded painter in *Wolf to the Slaughter,* the Irish girl in *Make Death Love Me,* and the mother in *Shake Hands Forever.* But I also like my sad heroes, Gray in *The Face of Trespass,* Alan in *Make Death Love Me.* My favorite of all my characters is the superlatively intellectual boy, Giles Mont, in *A Judgement in Stone.* This last is a victim, so perhaps that answers your question. I actually cried over the massacre of the Coverdale family in that novel and would have saved their lives except that by then it was too late.

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THE JURY BOX
by JON L. BREEN

In such books as *The Killing of Julia Wallace* and *The Burning of Evelyn Foster,* Jonathan Goodman has built an outstanding reputation as one of the best contemporary chroniclers of true crime cases. In his latest book, he turns to fictional crime but retains a factual style, as his unnamed crime-writing narrator, based (not too closely, I assume) on himself, re-examines a thirty-year-old murder case in which there has been a sudden and unexpected confession, followed by the confessor's own murder in similar circumstances.

**** Jonathan Goodman: *The Last Sentence,* St. Martin's, $8.95. The murder of Delia Willis, on which Goodman's narrator has written the definitive study, is closely based on the murder of Julia Wallace. The narrator, always a keen observer but not wholly likeable, revisits the suspects in the decades-old case, a bizarre and colorful lot. Finally, the real killer is revealed in a final scene equally notable for surprise and fair play. Like a vintage Christie or Queen, the novel makes the reader want to go back to the beginning and follow the carefully laid but overlooked clues. Impeccable style and craftsmanship make this one of the most original and notable detective novels of recent years.

*** Barry Reed: *The Verdict,* Simon and Schuster, $10.95. There is no mystery in this account of a massive medical malpractice suit, aside from the mystery inherent in any trial, but the splendid courtroom give-and-take will delight legal buffs. Reed, himself a Boston trial lawyer, doesn't avoid the clichés of legal fiction but gives them a solid enough undergirding to sustain credibility. The odd romance between lawyer-hero Galvin (who will remind many of Al Pacino in the film *. . . And Justice for All*) and a double-agent female lawyer for the other side is less convincing and interesting than the case.

*** Bill Knox: *Bombship,* Doubleday-Crime Club, $8.95. The latest mystery-adventure for Webb Carrick, of Her Majesty's Fishery Protection Service, involves modern-day piracy and a sunken (but still potentially lethal) World War II ammunition ship off the Scottish coast, guarded by giant conger eels. Knox is an old reliable. The reader knows just what to expect: neat plotting, an expertly rendered specialized background, and plenty of action, kind of like a Hardy Boys for adults.

*** Sean Flannery: *Eagles Fly,* Ace/Charter, $2.50. The latest in the ranks of Nazis-rise-again thrillers is a first-rate piece of storytelling. With great skill, Flannery maneuvers his large cast through a wide range of locales—Argentina, Israel, Germany, Wisconsin, Alaska, Washington, D.C. The wild impersonation tale is incredible if you stop to think about it—but you don't.

** Margaret James: *Footsteps in the Fog,* St. Martin's, $8.95. Offering enough plot strands for a Victorian three-decker, this tale of murders in

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1880 London is an old-fashioned (i.e., pre-fair play) detective story, not the gothic romance the packaging might suggest. The brothel background and the brooding fog-bound atmosphere are nicely done, but there are some mind-boggling coincidences and the killer's motive is incredible even in the context of insanity.

(James also writes historical novels as Pamela Bennetts.)

** George Bagby: *Country and Fatal,* Doubleday-Crime Club, $8.95. Narrator Bagby, whose agent wants him to ghost the memoirs of a pernicious country singer, is the target of murder attempts in this relatively weak entry in the Inspector Schmidt series. The telling and the New York background are good, as always, but the plot is not one of the author's better ones. Lately, for some reason, Aaron Marc Stein seems a much better writer as himself than as Bagby.

The latest novel in the Butcher series, Stuart Jason's *Kill Them Silently* (Pinnacle, $1.75), is steadfastly unrateable but must be recommended to connoisseurs of the outrageous. It is a mad orgy of unfettered, self-indulgent, myth-slinging storytelling, an amalgam of sex, sadomasochism, and bloodletting marked by relentless, ground-devouring clichés, a hilarious parody of all the badly written thrillers down through the years. Defying description, it must be quoted. "In a city of contrasts, democracy was always up at the plate . . . " "He was born an abandoned orphan . . . "

Who Done It? (Houghton Mifflin, $9.95), edited by Alice Laurance and Isaac Asimov, is a good anthology with an excellent gimmick. In an adaptation of the basic idea for Ellery Queen's *Challenge to the Reader* (1938), the seventeen original stories are printed with their authors' names in code and the reader must guess the perpetrators from an alphabetical list on the basis of style alone. (No series sleuths appear, renamed or otherwise.) Several *EQMM* regulars, including Michael Gilbert, Edward D. Hoch, Florence V. Mayberry, Ruth Rendell, and Lawrence Treat, are among the contributors. Your reviewer went ten for seventeen and should have done better.

Once hailed as a milestone, J. S. Fletcher's 1919 novel, *The Middle Temple Murder* (Dover, $3.00), does not hold up too well in its new reprint edition. Fletcher's strong sense of background and the likeably earnest sleuthing of Frank Spargo, who lacks the cynicism of later journalist-detectives, allow the tale to retain a good deal of its charm. But the leisurely paced yarn is not a good detective story by the standards of even ten years later. (Credit to Dover, though, for fighting inflation—the well-made quality paperback is a bargain at the price.)

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"Q"

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About Mr. Ben Shaler, the town's last veteran of the Civil War, and how thirteen-year-old Lee found the Minutes of Post 803, Grand Army of the Republic, and what they revealed . . .

LONE SURVIVOR

by HENRY T. PARRY

It started when Doc Jones asked me to help him clean out the two floors above his pharmacy. That was how I found the records.

"I can't go up and down those steps so good," Doc said, "while somebody your age—how old you now, Lee?"

I told him that in ten months, in February 1926, I was going to be 14.

"Good. I'll come up with you and show you what I want done."

"You don't have to come up," I said. "I know what's up there."

There was nothing much up there. The second floor was mostly a meeting hall, with gold letters on the front windows spelling out the Loyal Order of This and the Sons of That. There wasn't anything on the third floor, just some dusty rooms.

"Well, first thing," Doc said, "I want you should get that closet open that's at the top of the stairs. I've owned this building for ten years and that closet's been locked all this time and nobody knows how long before that. See can you get it open and empty her out. You can start right now if you want."

So I got a hammer and screwdriver and went up to the second floor and banged on the hinge pins until they came loose and I was able to yank the door off. The closet was shallow, with a couple of shelves holding maybe two dozen blue-covered books with lettering on the back that read: *Minutes of Post 803, Grand Army of the Republic.* Each book had a year lettered on it and for the earlier years there was a book for each year but starting in about 1900 there were three or four years in a book.

I looked at the last book, 1908-1912, and opened it to the last page. It was dated Jan. 17, 1912 and it listed the Comrades Present. That's what they were called, Comrades, and there were only three

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names listed. It said in kind of official language that they had voted to disband the post and that this was the last meeting. Comrade Kellow had agreed to dispose of the assets and records. I looked at the names, written in funny brown ink: Comrade Kellow, Comrade Diefenbach, Comrade Shaler.

I was pretty good in history in school and I knew I was looking at the records of the Grand Army of the Republic, the organization of Union veterans of the Civil War. Then it struck me that Comrade Shaler was Mr. Ben Shaler who lived out on Fourth Street with his granddaughter, Mrs. Lloyd. He was the last Civil War veteran in our town. Dad said he was 85 if he was a day.

I had gotten to know Mr. Shaler when I took over Bill Gottshalk's afternoon newspaper route. He would sit on the front porch behind the honeysuckle vine with a blanket around his lap even when it was 90 in the shade, with his feet on a little blue mat that he told me was made by weaving strips cut from his Union army uniform. In the center of the mat, in lighter blue, were woven the words *22nd Pa. Vol. Inf.* He had a beaky nose and white hair that was long because he didn't bother much about haircuts any more. His eyes were bright blue, with red rims, and they had a fixed look as if he was staring hard inwards instead of outwards.

But there wasn't anything wrong with his sight because he could read the paper without glasses. He had all his buttons too, because when I would sit there on the steps and ask him about the war he told me a lot of great stories about how it really was. Not so much about the fighting, although he had been in just about everything from Antietam to the Wilderness, but about scrounging around for food and the long marches and the dust and the mud and the sickness that hit everyone, a sickness that's too private to mention. And about how he was the best shot in his company.

One time he said, "Now I don't want to say anything against the Rebs. After all, I'm a businessman in this town."

When I told this to Dad, kind of making fun of the old man, Dad said, "Now wait a minute. You got to remember that he's thinking of a time when some people around here were Rebel sympathizers. And there were plenty of Copperheads in this part of the country too. Of course, they didn't say much once the war was over, so you don't hear about them."

Another thing you didn't hear about was the men who deserted.

"Hear people talk now," Mr. Shaler said, "nobody ever deserted from either army, Union or Confederate. Well, let me tell you right

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here and now, sonny, that ain't true. Why, I can give you the names of three, four fellows right here from this town who joined up and then just disappeared. It specially used to happen when the word got around that something big was coming up or when a man got bad news from home. But now you never hear anybody say that my granddaddy skedaddled just before Gettysburg."

Anyway, when I saw Mr. Shaler's name in this old record book, I yelled down to Doc and told him what I had found. He told me to bundle the records up and take them out to old Mr. Shaler and ask him what to do with them. So I got my kid brother's coaster wagon, piled in the books, and hauled them out to Fourth Street.

When I told Mr. Shaler what I had, he said, "Well, I never did hear how Crinky Kellow got shut of those books. The GAR was a great organization in its day, Lee, and I was proud to belong. It did a lot to see that the boys got their rights from the government—pensions, things like that. But no, Lee, take them away. Burn 'em."

So I put them in the loft of our barn and thought maybe I would look through them some time to see if they said anything about the war. Then came a rainy week—no ball games—and I went out and leafed through those yellow pages with their writing in brown ink. It was pretty dull stuff, but I did turn up something that made me sit up and take notice. It was in the minutes of a meeting held on September 20, 1881.

"Action on the application for membership of Ben Shaler, formerly 22nd Pa. Volunteer Infantry, was postponed on the motion of Comrade Adlai Benson. Comrade Benson said he had a serious matter to bring to the attention of the comrades in connection with this application and said he was working on a written statement which he would present to the October meeting. It having been duly moved and seconded, a majority voted that Ben Shaler's application should be held over."

I didn't think any more about it until I was in the cemetery on Decoration Day. Now, Decoration Day is a big celebration in our town. We had a lot of guys around who had been in the war in France and they would have a parade, some of them stuffed like sausages into their khaki uniforms. All the school kids from the eighth grade down were in the parade too, everybody carrying little flags. That year I had to march next to Bushel Farley who made me tired because he was always telling how once his dad had taken him to Gettysburg where he had seen a bullet hole in the fence around

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General Lee's headquarters and how he had stuck his finger through the hole.

The parade would start at the Civil War statue in the town square and head for the cemetery, with the silver cornet band at the head, playing songs like "Over There" and "Tramp, Tramp, Tramp." Mr. Shaler, in a dark blue suit and a black slouch hat that had a wreath insignia pinned on the front, sat alone in the back seat of Doc Simmons' Oakland touring with its top down. When Mr. Shaler waved to somebody, which wasn't often, he sometimes forgot to lower his hand.

They always said the cemetery was the prettiest place in town on Decoration Day because everybody went up there the week before and cut the grass and put bunches of lilacs in fruit jars on the graves. This year, like always, there were some speeches first and after that the Orpheus Male Choir sang "Battle Hymn of the Republic," with the band playing real soft and just one drum going tap, tap, tap. I could feel my skin go all prickly and my eyes filled with tears, and I wondered if I could ever be as brave as these heroes had been. I didn't think so.

Anyway, I didn't think I would ever get a chance because Dad said there wasn't going to be any more wars. After the "Battle Hymn" the firing squad stepped forward a couple of paces and fired three volleys. I tried to stand as close behind them as I could so I could pick up the empty cartridge casings. After that, Eddy Faulstick, who had been a real bugler, played "Taps." When I heard the slow beautiful notes rising over the maples and the flags and the heads of the ordinary folks of our town, I felt that I, that all of us, were part of something big, bigger than we were, and sad too.

When the ceremony was over, I walked around the cemetery looking at the headstones on the veterans' graves which had been decorated with new flags for the day. I found Adlai Benson's and it said that he had been born April 10, 1843 and had died October 22, 1881, and he had served in the 22nd Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry.

There was something about these dates that bothered me, so when I got home I went up to the barn and looked at those records again.

On September 20, Adlai Benson said he had a serious matter to bring up about Mr. Shaler. On October 22, according to the headstone, Adlai Benson died. I looked at the minutes of the October 1881 meeting, but they didn't mention Adlai Benson or Mr. Shaler. Then I happened to glance at the minutes of the next meeting, which was held on November 19, 1881.

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These minutes said in fancy language that whereas Comrade Adlai Benson had been a loyal member of this post, and whereas Comrade Benson had been treacherously shot and killed by an unknown assassin while on his way to a meeting of this post, be it now ordered that the post send condolences to his family, and be it further ordered that a reward of $500 be offered for information leading to the arrest of the person who committed this heinous crime.

I paged through the records, but I didn't find anything more about Adlai Benson. I did notice that in the list of Comrades Present for the July 1882 meeting, the name of Ben Shaler appeared for the first time. I wondered and wondered about the timing, but just because a second thing happens after a first thing, it doesn't mean that the first thing is the cause. I decided to ask Mr. Shaler about it.

"I remember Ad's case real good," he told me. "Shot one evening as he was coming into town on the old quarry road. Him and me was in the army together. Ad was a good soldier too. Why, I remember once—"

"Did they ever find out who killed him?"

"I tell you this town was upset for months about Ad. They questioned everybody they could lay their hands on. They even questioned me. I didn't have any alibi for that evening, but neither did most folks. The boys at the post was pretty riled up, I'm telling you. A couple even took me aside, sneaky and private, as if they thought maybe I had something to do with it. I cooled them off pretty quick, don't you forget it."

"Did they catch—"

"No, no, they never did. And everybody is gone now, except me. It's all forgotten, all forgotten. Seems you might just as well burn those records, Lee."

About two weeks later I met Mrs. Lloyd when she was sweeping her front walk. I hadn't seen Mr. Shaler, so I asked about him.

"He's pretty sick, Lee. I don't think he's going to make it. He's off his head most of the time. After all, he's going to be eighty-seven next month, so I suppose—"

I said I was sorry to hear it and did she want me to do anything, run errands or something.

"That's real nice of you to ask, Lee. Oh, wait here just a minute. I just remembered something."

She went into the house and came out with a small leather box, the leather old and dry and split. It was a Union army cartridge

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box, the kind every infantryman carried. Mr. Shaler had showed it to me once.

"Forty dead men in every box, we used to say, Lee. You know why. Because we carried forty minié balls in it."

"Grandpa always said that after he was gone he wanted you should have it," Mrs. Lloyd said. "He's forgotten all about it, so it won't matter if I give it to you now."

That night after supper I took some saddle soap and began polishing that old cartridge box. The leather had come apart at the top edges where the stitching had rotted away. I snipped out the old stitching, figuring I could get the shoemaker to sew it up again. I planned to hang it on the wall of my room right next to a Currier and Ives picture of the battle of the Wilderness that Dad had found in a store in the city and had bought for me.

I pulled all the stitches loose along the top edges, and between the two layers of leather I saw a folded paper. When I pulled it out, it broke into four pieces along the folds. This is what was written on it, in faded brown handwriting.

Statement of Comrade Adlai Benson for October 22, 1881
Meeting of Post 803 GAR.

Comrades, before the application for membership of Ben Shaler is considered, there are some things I think you should know.

Now a lot of you boys have been on picket duty during the war and you know it wasn't anything unusual if after yo· had been posted to the same spot a couple of times you got in touch with the Reb pickets down the road or over on the other side of the branch and maybe swap coffee for tobacco and agree how awful the army was and pick up some news. It was done all the time, as you know, because the boys didn't see much use in shooting each other. There would be plenty of shooting later, enough to go round.

One day me, Ben Shaler, a fellow named Dick Garrett who I don't think any of you know—he was killed at Cold Harbor—and Lonnie Edwards were on picket duty. It was Lonnie and Dick's turn to sleep and we, me and Ben, were just sitting there in the rain when Ben stands up and says he is going down the road and talk to the Rebs.

He went down a ways and then he comes back. Ad, he said, I ain't coming back. It's been two and a half years since I enlisted and I'm sick of it. Sick of the marching, the diarhee, the same old pork and hardtack and coffee. This war is going to be over pretty soon and I aim to be alive when it is. You can get killed just as dead on the

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last day of the war as any other time. You can say that I went out to do a little scouting and the Rebs took me prisoner.

I told him that what he was doing was deserting, and deserting to the enemy at that, and he said that's right but nobody but me would know it. With that he went on down the road. I heard him hail the Reb pickets and that was the last of him until I met him on the street right here in town about six years after the war.

The first thing he asked was did I tell anybody. I said I hadn't but the whole thing bothered me. Well, he said, it don't bother me none because here I am home again when I might be lying under the sod and the dew, waiting the Judgment Day, like the poem says. You just keep telling everybody I was taken prisoner.

So that is why I am against Ben Shaler being made a member of this post and becoming entitled to all the benefits that may come of it. I have already told Ben that I was writing this out because I wanted to give him time to defend himself if that should be called for."

So Mr. Shaler had been a deserter. Or Adlai Benson said he was. Anyway, Mr. Shaler did become a member of the post, maybe because Adlai Benson was no longer around. I tried to keep from thinking about how Mr. Shaler might have gotten hold of this statement, about what had happened that evening on the old quarry road when Adlai Benson was on his way to the GAR meeting. But why didn't Mr. Shaler get rid of the statement? Did he want somebody to find out some time when he was no longer around? To show that he'd been a dangerous man, nobody to fool with?

Mr. Shaler died the following week. A couple of days after they had fired those last volleys over him, I met Mrs. Lloyd.

"Lee, if you could stop by the house some day there's this old mat that Grandpa kept all these years. Since Grandpa wanted you to have that old leather box, I figured you might like that mat. I don't like somehow to just set it out on the trash."

I didn't know how to tell her I didn't want it. I had thought that if a man had been a soldier in a good cause he must have been a good man. Well, it wasn't so. I could see now that a man could change, that he might be a hero at Antietam in 1862 and just as easy desert before Cold Harbor in 1864. I felt different now about war and heroes and stuff like that, felt that I knew more about what war taught men to do. Maybe it was a good thing that there wasn't going to be any more wars, like Dad said. Not everybody was a hero

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and there was a lot more to it than Decoration Day parades and bugles blowing "Taps" for somebody else.

But I said, "Yeah, thanks, Mrs. Lloyd. I'm sorry to hear about Mr. Shaler. I hope he wasn't too sick or anything."

"Well, he rambled around in his thoughts a lot. Seemed to go back to the old days. One night I was sitting with him and he just kept saying over and over for two whole hours, 'Of course I did it. What's one more? Why should Ad be any different? Of course I did it. What's one more? Why should Ad be any different?' Over and over and over. Well, you stop by and pick up that mat. How's your Mom and Dad?"

But I knew what the old man was talking about because I was the only person in town who knew what was written in those old GAR records and in Adlai Benson's statement, and who knew that somebody had shot and killed Adlai Benson when he was on his way to tell that Mr. Shaler had been a deserter. Now I knew who did it.

But I never told anybody and I never will. Saturday morning when Mom told me to take our papers and trash down to the edge of the lot and burn them, I just added those GAR records and Adlai Benson's statement to the pile. They made a good blaze, they were so old and dry. I kept stirring them up with a clothesline prop so that every now and then you would see a whole page covered with brown writing, not yet touched by fire.

The page for that last meeting in 1812 showed up that way, lying there as if it would never burn. Then the flame crept around the edges, the paper curled, and the flame crawled down the list of names of the Comrades Present: Comrade Kellow, Comrade Diefenbach, Comrade Shaler, and one by one the names became ashes.

"Q"

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a *NEW* Major McDonlevy story by

ROBERT EDWARD ECKELS

Welcome back, Henry T. McDonlevy, former Major in the United States Army, and if he says so himself, "still the world's greatest living adjutant"—among other things. This time, after the prelude of a betting golf foursome, the Major and three comparative strangers settle down to a game of seven-card stud poker—with interesting results . . .

NEVER PLAY ANOTHER MAN'S GAME

by ROBERT EDWARD ECKELS

French Lick Springs is a quiet little town set in the rolling Indiana countryside some 35 miles west of Louisville. Back in the early years of the century it had quite a reputation as a health spa. But then tastes changed or the mineral springs which had given it its name dried up, and French Lick settled back to its present sleepy existence—but not before somebody, with the prescience of Ford introducing the Edsel, built a sprawling brick hotel to house the hordes the railroad was sure to bring.

For years the hotel was an enormous white elephant. But then finally the Sheraton people took it over, turned it into a resort on the order of the Greenbrier and Homestead in the east, complete with golf course, riding stables, and the rest, and as far as I know made a very good thing out of it. At least, they were doing all right when I was there a few years back, and it was there, of course, that I first ran into Donner—in the literal sense of the word.

I was going up the broad central staircase while he was coming down, head cocked to one side so he could devote full attention to

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the much shorter, barrel-chested man accompanying him.

"$10,000," he was saying as I approached. "That's top price, Major, and you sure as hell won't do better elsewhere."

"Perhaps not," the Major said, "but the more I think about it, the less sure I am I want to part with it at all."

"Better stop thinking then," Donner said, "because—"

He never finished the sentence, because he became aware of me and ducked back instinctively to avoid a collision that otherwise would have been inevitable. "Watch where you're going," he said. He was a tall, almost lanky man with close-cropped graying hair and a long sleepy-eyed face. There was nothing droopy or sleepy about his voice, though; it was sharp and waspish.

"One of us should," I said mildly.

Donner's eyes narrowed, but then he nodded curtly. "You have a point," he said, and taking his companion by the arm guided him down past me. "Now, Major," he said, "as I was saying about that car—"

A bellman coming down behind them smiled at me ruefully. "You're lucky you caught him in a good mood," he said. "Mr. Donner's nobody to get on the wrong side of."

"Big man around here, is he?"

"Big enough," the bellman said. He looked down at the departing pair. "And I'll tell you another thing," he said. "If that fella with him has something Mr. Donner really wants, he might as well kiss it goodbye now. It won't be long before Donner gets it."

"I'll have to remember that," I said.

The next time was several days later and again it was a case of arriving at the same place at practically the same time—in this instance, the starter's desk at the golf course adjoining the hotel grounds. A balding, pudgy-faced man was with Donner and the Major this time, and since there were three of them and one of me, the starter—following his usual practice—asked if we'd like to play together and make up a foursome.

Donner looked at me quizzically. "I know you from someplace, don't I?"

"The stairway at the hotel," I said. "We nearly knocked each other over."

"So we did," Donner said. "I hope you plan to keep a better lookout today than you did then."

I shrugged. Impudence had paid off before. I gambled it would

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again. "Frankly," I said, "I was hoping the same about you."

It took him a couple of seconds to make up his mind. Then he laughed. "You've got spunk. I'll say that for you. And who knows? Maybe, for safety's sake, we should play together. My name's Donner. This is Mr. White." He nodded to indicate the pudgy-faced man. "And—"

"McDonlevy," the Major said. "Henry T. McDonlevy, late Major United States Army, and if I may say so myself, still the world's greatest living adjutant."

"Frank Harris," I said.

"You have a handicap, Mr. Harris?" Donner said.

"Nothing official," I said, "and this is my first time on this course anyway. But I usually manage to get around most places somewhere between 90 and 100."

"In that case, you don't have to worry about anybody in this group overwhelming you—or vice versa," Donner said. "Now, shall we draw for partners? The two short straws against the two long? Or does somebody have a better idea?"

Nobody did, and the luck of the draw pitted Donner and the Major against White and me. It didn't seem to matter at the time, because Donner apparently hadn't lied when he said none of us would overwhelm the others, and the first three holes went by uneventfully. On the fourth, though, a long dogleg backed up against a stand of trees and rough ground. White pulled out a long old-fashioned wood and stepped up to address the ball on the tee.

The Major, standing off to one side, folded his arms and frowned. "You surely aren't going to use that heavy a club on this hole, are you?" he said.

White looked at him curiously. "Why not?"

"Because you'll overshoot much too easily—even if you just tap the ball."

White glanced back down the fairway, then shook his head. "Not this boy," he said.

The Major shrugged. "Well, it's your business, of course," he said. "However—" He turned to me. "What do you say, Harris? After all, he's your partner."

"It's his shot," I said, "and his club. He should know what it can do."

"Wouldn't care to bet on that, would you?" the Major said. "Say, $50 to make it interesting."

I hesitated, then stepped over to where White was standing by

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the tee. "Let me see that club," I said. I hefted it, took a few practise swings, then handed it back. "You have a bet, Major," I said and started back across. As I did so, though, my foot knocked against White's ball, sending it skittering off and down a small incline into a patch of tall grass.

"Damn," I said. "No, wait. I'll get it."

I didn't, though. Nor did five or ten minutes of patient searching by the others turn it up either. Finally I said, "Sorry. I guess I owe you a ball."

White shook his head. "Don't worry about it."

"No, I insist." I dug down into my bag and came up with a ball which I set down on his tee, then stepped back again, careful this time to keep my feet well clear. "Let's see what you can do with that one," I said.

White hesitated, then glanced over at the Major, and after receiving only a slight shrug in response re-addressed the ball and swung. It was as clean a stroke as I've seen in a long time, but the ball rose only in a low arc and even after it hit and rolled barely made it halfway down the green.

I smiled. "Maybe next time," I said, "you'll know better than to judge a club by the size of its head, Major," I said.

"Maybe I will," the Major said. "And since it was my idea to start with, I doubt I should complain at the cost of the lesson. Still, I don't suppose it would be too remiss for me to suggest you give me some chance to get my money back."

"That would depend on what you had in mind," I said.

He shrugged. "A small standing bet," he said. "Say $10 a hole on low team score for the rest of the game."

"Just you and me," I said, "or everybody?"

"Make it everybody," White said. "If we're going to play partners, I'll feel bad if you lose and I don't. I'll feel even worse if you win. How about you, Donner?"

Donner shrugged. "I only feel bad when I lose," he said, "but I'll go along with the group."

Later, though, when we had all played and were trudging down the green to where our balls lay, Donner fell in step beside me. White and the Major were some yards back and out of earshot.

"Maybe I shouldn't have been so quick to get in on this bet," he said.

"Why do you say that?"

"Call it a feeling," he said. "But I wouldn't be at all surprised to

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find you kicked that ball away on purpose back there so you could ring in one with a dead center."

"And you wouldn't be wrong either," I said. "White couldn't have overshot with my ball if he'd used a rifle. If that bothers you, then I'm sorry, but I learned a long time ago never to let a setup stand or bet another man's game—unless I can change at least one of the givens. As for the rest of the game—well, if it's straight, I'll play it straight. But I'll fight fire with fire every time before I let anybody con me."

"You're sure then that's what they were trying to do?"

I grinned. "Well, maybe not," I said. "But on the other hand I couldn't be sure they weren't either. And there's no harm in playing it safe, now, is there?"

Donner smiled bleakly and continued to walk beside me. He didn't say anything, but I didn't think he disagreed.

Straight game or not, between us White and I managed to win nine of the last fourteen holes so that, far from getting his money back, the Major ended up more out of pocket than ever. He seemed to accept it gracefully, though.

"As the Good Book, which I find a more than reasonably reliable guide, points out," he said, smiling, " 'To everything there is a season.' And while winning and losing aren't specifically mentioned by name, I'm sure they're covered at least by implication."

"Well, implication or not," White said, "today sure wasn't your season to win."

"No," the Major said. "But tomorrow might be. Shall we try it again then for the same stakes? Or higher if you wish."

I shook my head slowly. "I'm sorry," I said. "I wish I could oblige you, but I'm really down here more or less on business."

"Oh?"

"I'm an architect," I explained, "and my company's thinking of submitting a design for a shopping center that some developers are thinking of putting up this side of Louisville. Before they commit themselves, though, they want somebody to go over the specs on the ground, and that's going to keep me tied up for the rest of the week."

"Well, there's always the weekend," the Major said. "Or perhaps it would be simpler just to change the game. Would you have any objection to continuing, say, over a card table in my room after dinner tonight?"

"What kind of cards?" White said.

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"Poker?" the Major said. "Unless, of course, there's something else you prefer."

"No, poker's fine with me. Donner? Harris?"

Donner shrugged. "I wouldn't mind getting my money back."

That left it up to me, of course, and after scotching the golf rematch with $90 of somebody else's money in my pocket, how could I say no now?

I ate early that evening, but there were other things I had to do; so it was after nine when I arrived at the Major's room. The others were already there.

"Sorry I'm late," I said.

"No matter," the Major said. "We were just chatting anyway."

"You don't have to worry, partner," White said. "I was here. So they couldn't gang up on us." He grinned. "But that's the last of it. From now on in, it's every man for himself."

"Glad to hear you say it," I said. "It'll make me feel better when I take your money."

"If," White said.

The Major picked up the cards. "Seven-card stud all right?" he said. "$10 bet limit, no more than two raises each bet?"

"It's your funeral," White said. "Make it easy on yourself."

Now, a $10 bet may not sound like much of a funeral, particularly for the group we had there. But seven-card stud, despite its apparent simplicity, is not a game for beginners. Essentially, each player receives two cards face down, followed in turn around the table by four more face up, then a seventh card face down again, from all of which he selects his best five-card poker hand to match against the others in the game. As you might guess, it's a fast game with none of the delays inherent in other forms—dray, for example, where there is a discard and redeal.

The catch is that, in addition to the standard ante before the first card is dealt, you bet on the first face-up card and every card thereafter. So given four players, a $10 bet limit with two raises per bet meant that each individual pot could easily run over $600—and $600 even in these inflationary times will do a lot more than just feed chickens. Couple that with the game's speed and you can see why you can lose an awful lot of money very fast playing stud poker.

Most good players don't, though, and the reason is they learn very quickly to assess the odds and drop out fast if the early cards don't put those odds almost overwhelmingly in their favor. They also

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learn to assess their fellow players. And in this particular group, Donner soon proved himself to be a formidable opponent, punctuating an otherwise staid game with unpredictable bursts of seemingly reckless abandon. It was a deliberate tactic, of course, but all the more dangerous because it was impossible to guess when his play was backed up by cards and when it was not.

White, on the other hand, was as predictable as pie, while the Major's attention seemed to be everywhere and on everything except his cards. It didn't seem to hurt him, though, because after an initial loss he began to win and by midnight was close to $500 ahead.

That's when I called for a new deck.

White pushed his cards out into the center of the table. "I'll go along with that," he said. Most of the Major's $500 had come from him.

The Major looked helplessly at the two of us. "This is embarrassing," he said, "but, unfortunately, I just have this one deck. I suppose I should have arranged for more. Frankly, though, it never occurred to me we might need them."

White shook his head disgustedly. "Wouldn't you know it?" he said. "Even when I want to change my luck it stays bad."

It was the Major's deal and he reached out to pull White's cards over to stack them with the rest of the deck.

"They'll have cards at the front desk," I said. "Or the bell captain will."

"Well, yes," the Major said, "but it seems a little late—"

"If you don't want to call," I said, "I will."

He drew himself up. "Of course," he said stiffly, "if you feel that strongly about it."

Donner sighed. "What the hell," he said. "Why argue? If Harris has to work tomorrow, he doesn't want to make that late a night of it anyway. So why don't we just call it quits for a while. There'll be another time."

"So there will," the Major said, beaming again. "Shall we say tomorrow night the same time?"

"We'll see," I said and left it at that.

The next morning Donner was already in the dining room when I came down to breakfast. He was seated at a small table near the window. When he saw me just about the same time I saw him he beckoned me over to join him.

"You're an early riser," I said as I sat down.

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"When it serves my purpose," Donner said. "In this case, to find out just what all that fuss about the deck last night was about."

I hesitated. Finally I said, "How well do you know Major McDonlevy?"

Donner shrugged. "I met him about six weeks ago," he said, "at an antique auto rally. He had a '55 Thunderbird on display which he indicated he might be interested in selling. Naturally I wanted to pursue the matter further."

"Why naturally?" I said. "Do you collect antique cars?"

"When it serves my purpose," Donner said again. "The problem with being rich today, Mr. Harris, is that there are so few ways to show it. Maybe that's why I like unique things and maybe that's why I want that car, because not everybody and his brother can go out and buy one. But what's that got to do with the Major and the cards last night?"

"Maybe nothing," I said. "But on the other hand, somebody was crimping the aces and kings so he'd spot them the next time around. I can't prove it, because I couldn't catch him at it, but I think it was the Major."

"I see," Donner said. He looked thoughtful. Then his eyebrows lifted and a slight smile played around the corners of his mouth. "Speak of the devil," he said, looking past me.

"The Major?"

"No. White."

I looked around then. White had spotted us and was making his way across the floor toward our table. "Well," he said, coming up, "I caught you, didn't I? Plotting strategy, eh?"

"You think that's necessary?" Donner said.

"Some people might," White said. He sat down without waiting for an invitation. "After the game last night I got to thinking," he said to me. "Your luck wasn't all that bad, so why would you want to change it by changing the deck?"

I glanced over at Donner, who gazed impassively back. "We were just talking about that," I said. "I think the Major was trying to mark the deck."

White laughed harshly. "I figured it had to be something like that," he said. "The Major, huh? I wonder just where that's covered in the Good Book he's so fond of quoting."

"I don't think it is," I said.

"No, I wouldn't be surprised if you weren't right. But I'll tell you what is," White said. "Do unto others. And an eye for an eye and

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a tooth for a tooth. I say we get some of our own back tonight."

"How? By crimping our own cards?"

White shook his head. "That's for suckers," he said. "What I had in mind was more like stacking the deck. Let me show you what I mean." Without waiting for a response he rose and made his way back out of the room.

Donner looked down at the back of his hands. "Curiouser and curiouser," he said.

"That's one way of putting it," I said.

A few minutes later White was back, carrying two identical packs of playing cards, one of which he passed over to Donner. "The way to do this," he said, "is call McDonlevy and tell him we'll play in your room tonight. That way—if you're game—we can start out with your deck and then later when the time's ripe switch to mine—without, of course, letting the Major know that's what we're doing."

"That might not be as easy as it sounds," I said. "The Major's no fool."

"You leave that to me," White said. "All you have to do is make sure you two sit down across from each other. It doesn't matter which of you gets the winning hand as long as we're all in it together, but the only way to make sure the Major gets the hand he's supposed to is to put him in the middle across from me. Okay?"

White opened the pack and took out the cards. "Now, let's see what kind of hand we ought to give him." He thought for a minute, then went through the deck quickly, pulling out three of the four aces and setting them down in a neat row followed by the king of hearts and the king of spades. "How about that?" he said. "A nice full house."

"A good hand," Donner said.

"Sure," White said. He turned over the top card remaining in the deck. It was a seven. He set it on the table, then pulled out the other three sevens to place beside it. "But not as good as four of a kind."

Donner looked thoughtful again, the way he had when I had first accused the Major of crimping cards. White grinned and took a card from the top of the deck again, then picked up the ace of spaces from the Major's hand and the seven of clubs from Donner's and put them under it followed by another two cards from the deck, then another ace and seven—and so on until he had the whole sequence arranged the way he wanted it. "That's it," he said. "Four hands, seven cards each, and whoever's to my right is guaranteed to be the winner. How about it?"

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Donner continued to look thoughtful for another long moment. Finally he said, "Do you know where my room is?"

"I can find it," White said.

"Good," Donner said. "Be there tonight. Bring your cards."

White grinned. "I knew you'd see it my way," he said. He placed the stacked deck back in its box and put it in his pocket, then rose. "I'd better be going," he said. "It wouldn't do for the Major to walk in and see the three of us together. It might give him the wrong idea."

"So it might," Donner said.

I didn't say anything, but after White had left I sat for a long minute frowning out the window. "I don't like this," I said at last.

"Why not?" Donner said.

"It's too pat. Maybe White wasn't working with the Major to set me up the other day. And then again maybe he was. And maybe he still is. Because all it would take to make those four sevens of yours look mighty small is for the Major to draw a fourth ace. And if White slipped it to him on the seventh card—as he would—face down, we wouldn't realize what was happening until all the bets were made. And what would we do then—admit we had been part of a conspiracy to cheat at cards? That would look really great when it got out, wouldn't it? I don't know about you, but I care about my reputation."

"So do I," Donner said. "Perhaps even more than you."

"And you're still willing to risk it?"

"Why risk anything?" Donner said. "What was it you said the other day? Never play another man's game—unless you can change one of the givens?"

"And which of the givens are you going to change now?"

He leaned forward and told me.

That evening I made it a point to get to Donner's room early but deliberately held back from taking a seat while Donner puttered around playing host. White gave us a couple of curious looks, but the Major solved the problem neatly by sitting down almost as soon as he came into the room. I promptly sat down to his right so that when White took his place opposite him Donner would be placed seemingly by chance in the winner's seat.

Actually it had been his suggestion. "It'll look more natural," he said, "when the heavy betting starts if I'm the one to initiate it." There'd been no reason to disagree, of course, and in any case, the three of us—White, Donner, and myself—had already agreed that

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even though we had the deck we wouldn't use it unless it was clear the Major was trying to cheat us as well.

Even as we said it, though, at least two and probably all three of us knew we were lying. But as it turned out, of course, it was a moot point, because the Major was his usual expansive, larcenous self and those telltale minute nicks and creases marking the high cards began to show up shortly after we started playing.

I caught Donner's eye and was rewarded with a short, almost imperceptible nod. He'd spotted it too. White's face gave nothing away, but after a couple of more hands he asked Donner if he could have something to drink.

"Sure," Donner said. "There's no gin, but I've got just about everything else. Scotch? Bourbon?"

"Just water," White said. "Or plain soda."

The Major nodded approvingly. "Very wise," he said. "Liquor and cards mix even less well than oil and water—although I suppose in a friendly game it wouldn't hurt to stretch the rule to the extent of a weak bourbon and water."

"Sure," Donner said again and rose to get the drinks, including a Scotch for himself and a bourbon for me. I sipped from mine and if the Major's was any match for it, it was far from weak. But the Major didn't say anything and neither did I. White placed his glass on the edge of the table between him and Donner, where it remained ignored and forgotten until the deal came around to him again. He shuffled carefully, then as he reached out to offer the deck to Donner for the cut, he brushed against the glass, knocking it over.

The liquid inside spilled out and away from the table, but Donner jerked back instinctively anyway, jarring the table and setting his and mine and the Major's glasses rocking precariously—and making it easy in the confusion that followed for White to drop the clean deck smoothly into one pocket while pulling the other out from the other. When everything had settled down, he re-offered the cards to Donner.

"Want to try again?" he said.

Donner hesitated, then rapped the cards lightly with his knuckles. "Why cut your luck," he said.

White nodded and dealt out the first two cards face down impassively: a queen and a ten to me and by the plan a pair of aces to the Major and two sevens to Donner and God knew what to himself. "Anybody care to go out on a limb and open?" he said.

Donner stroked his fingertips across the backs of his cards for a

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long moment, then tossed some bills out into the center of the table. "Let's cut out the fooling around," he said. "$50 to start."

The Major looked up quickly. "I thought we had agreed to a $10 limit," he said.

Donner grinned. "That was last night, Major," he said. "This is a different ball game and I don't remember anybody saying anything about any limit at all. Of course," he added, "if it's too rich for your blood—"

The Major smiled faintly. "No," he said, "I think I can keep up." He added $50 of his own to the pot. White and I followed suit, and then White dealt out the first of the face-up cards: the queen of clubs to me, the king of spades to the Major, a ten to Donner, and a jack to himself.

It was the Major's bet since he had the high card showing. "Since the limits are off," he said, "shall we go all the way and say $100."

Donner grinned. "You're a man after my own heart, Major," he said. "Your $100 and another $100 on top of it."

It was awfully early in the game for that kind of betting and raising but no one objected, and White waited until all the money was down, then dealt again. This time I drew a second ten, giving me two pair and a reasonable excuse, should the question arise, for staying in—but only an excuse since the ace and seven he dealt in turn to the Major and Donner raised them to three of a kind each while White contented himself with a lowly four.

The next round was a seeming throwaway: eight of hearts to me, jack of spades to the Major, a meaningless king to Donner, and a queen to White. The sixth round was something else again, because this was the round that should put Donner squarely in the driver's seat, and White called out the cards as he dealt them around: "Five of diamonds. Ten of spades. Pair of sevens. Two of clubs. Pair of sevens bets."

Donner pursed his lips. $50 and $100 bets had become the rule rather than the exception and there was a large amount of money in the pot. But apparently not enough. Very deliberately Donner took an envelope from his inside pocket and laid it on the table. "All right, Major," he said. "Let's really separate the men from the boys. There's $5000 in that envelope and it says I've got the best hand. What do you say?"

"You know I can't match that kind of bet," the Major said.

"Sure you can," Donner said. "You've got the Thunderbird, haven't you? Put up the key and we'll call it all even."

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The Major shook his head. "Not for $5000," he said. "I won't let you force me out, but I won't be stampeded either. Make it $10,000 and you've got a bet."

Donner grinned. "I thought you might say that," he said. He took a second envelope from his pocket and laid it on top of the first. "$5000 more," he said. "Back to you."

Without hesitating, the Major placed his car key beside the two envelopes. I folded up my cards and pushed them off to one side. "Too rich for my blood," I said. "I'm out."

White looked up sharply. "Now wait—" he began.

Donner rounded on him savagely. "Now wait nothing. I said this was a new ball game and it is—just the Major and me. All you do is deal."

White regarded the two of them silently for a moment, then dealt out the last two cards face down. Donner smiled with satisfaction, because by dropping out, of course, I had upset the sequence that White had planned so that the Major now drew the card that in the normal course would have gone to me, and Donner the one that would have gone to the Major. Donner leaned back now without bothering to look at it. "I'll stand," he said. "How about you, Major?"

The Major nodded. Any additional betting would have been anticlimactic anyway.

Donner turned over the first two cards White had dealt him. "Four sevens," he said. "Not much maybe but enough to beat three aces."

The Major nodded again. "But not enough to beat a royal flush." He turned over the seventh and last card he had drawn. It was the queen of spades and around it he grouped the ten, jack, king, and ace of spades. "Ironic, isn't it," he said, "but three aces is the hand I was betting on. I thought you had two pair." He shrugged. "If you hadn't gone for the really big bet and forced the others out, I wouldn't have drawn the queen of spades and you would have won. Still, I suppose it's as fruitless to speculate on might-have-beens in poker as anything else."

Donner didn't respond and after a moment the Major picked up the two envelopes and his car key, then rose, and almost as an afterthought scooped up the rest of the pot. "I realize it's bad form to quit while you're ahead," he said, "but somehow I don't think the game could ever be quite the same."

Donner still didn't say anything as the Major went out. In fact, there wasn't much left for anybody to say. Or do. And shortly afterward I left myself. Instead of slinking back to my room, though,

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I rode the elevator down to the main floor and left the building through a side entrance. Moments later a sleek low-slung car pulled up to the curb beside me and I got in.

"Well, my boy," the Major said, "I must say that went well."

"I won't argue," I said, "but one of these days you're going to go too far. What would have happened if Donner hadn't suggested I drop out so we could get you that queen?"

"But that was the whole point of planting the idea," the Major said, "and setting it up so he'd get his fourth seven on the sixth card. So he would suggest it. If he hadn't, then I'm afraid all our hard work and preparation would have been in vain. But," he added expansively, "it wasn't, and as the Good Book so aptly points out it's what happens that counts, not all the what-ifs and might-have-beens."

I looked at him curiously. "Is that really in the Bible?" I said.

"Oh, I'm sure it is someplace," he said, "and if it isn't it should be. You can look it up sometime. But for now I'd suggest we'd do better to arrange to forward White his share and then shake the dust of this place from our feet before Donner recovers enough from his shock to discover that not only is there no shopping-center project planned for this area but that the young architect he knew as Frank Harris is none other than my valued associate and friend Tom James."

"Q"

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a *NEW* short story by

PETER LOVESEY

first publication in the United States

Genealogy, Webster says, is the study of a family pedigree. Meet the ancestor-hunting John Smith, tracer of lost persons, a lonely man "working his way through the lists" in search of any family he might have.

A chilling story of coincidental and not-so-coincidental meetings, written by Peter Lovesey, whose Sergeant Cribb detections you've been enjoying so much on public television . . .

A MAN WITH A FORTUNE

by PETER LOVESEY

Most of the passengers were looking to the right, treating themselves to the breath-catching view of San Francisco Bay the captain of the 747 had invited them to enjoy. Not Eva. Her eyes were locked on the lighted no-smoking sign and the order to fasten seatbelts. Until that was switched off she could not think of relaxing. She knew the takeoff was the most dangerous part of the flight, and it was a delusion to think you were safe the moment the plane was airborne. She refused to be distracted. She would wait for the proof that the takeoff had been safely accomplished: the switching off of that small, lighted sign.

"Your first time?" The man on her left spoke with a West Coast accent. She had sensed that he had been waiting to speak since they took their seats, darting glances her way. Probably he was just friendly like most San Franciscans she had met on the trip, but she couldn't possibly start a conversation now.

Without turning, she mouthed a negative.

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"I mean your first time to England," he went on. "Anyone can see you've flown before, the way you put your hand luggage under the seat before they even asked us, and fixed your belt. I just wondered if this is your first trip to England."

She didn't want to seem ungracious. He was obviously trying to put her at ease. She smiled at the no-smoking sign and nodded. It was, after all, her first flight in this direction. The fact that she was English and had just been on a business trip to California was too much to explain.

"Mine too," he said. "I've promised myself this for years. My people came from England, you see, forty, fifty years back. All dead now, the old folk. I'm the only one of my family left, and I ain't so fit myself." He planted his hand on his chest. "Heart condition."

Eva gave a slight start as an electronic signal sounded and the light went off on the panel she was watching. A stewardess's voice announced that seatbelts could be unfastened and it was now permissible to smoke in the seats reserved for smoking, to the right of the cabin. Eva closed her eyes a moment and felt the tension ease.

"The doctor says I could go any time," her companion continued. "I could have six months or six years. You know how old I am? Forty-two. When you hear something like that at my age it kind of changes your priorities. I figured I should do what I always promised myself—go to England and see if I had any people left over there. So here I am, and I feel like a kid again. Terrific."

She smiled, mainly from the sense of release from her anxiety at the takeoff, but also at the discovery that the man she was seated beside was as generous and open in expression as he was in conversation. In no way was he a predatory male. She warmed to him—his shining blue eyes in a round, tanned face topped with a patch of hair like cropped corn, his small hands holding tight to the armrests, his Levi shirt bulging over the seatbelt he had not troubled to unclasp. "Are you on a vacation too?" he asked.

She felt able to respond now. "Actually I live in England."

"You're English? How about that!" He made it sound like one of the more momentous discoveries of his life, oblivious that there must have been at least a hundred Britons on the flight. "You've been on vacation in California, and now you're traveling home?"

There was a ten-hour flight ahead of them, and Eva's innately shy personality flinched at the prospect of an extended conversation, but the man's candor deserved an honest reply. "Not exactly a vacation. I work in the electronics industry. My company wants to

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make a big push in the production of microcomputers. They sent me to see the latest developments in your country."

"Around Santa Clara?"

"That's right," said Eva, surprised that he should know. "Are you by any chance in electronics?"

He laughed. "No, I'm just one of the locals. The place is known as Silicone Valley, did you know that? I'm in farming, and I take an interest in the way the land is used. Excuse me for saying this: you're pretty young to be representing your company on a trip like this."

"Not so young really. I'm twenty-eight." But she understood his reaction. She herself had been amazed when the Director of Research had called her into his office and asked her to make the trip. Some of her colleagues were equally astonished. The most incredulous was her flat-mate, Janet—suave, sophisticated Janet, who was on the editorial side at the *Sunday Telegraph*, and had been on assignments to Dublin, Paris, and Geneva, and was always telling Eva how deadly dull it was to be confined to an electronics lab.

"I wish I were twenty-eight," said her fellow traveler. "That was the year I was married. Patty was a wonderful wife to me. We had some great times."

He paused in a way that begged Eva's next question. "Something went wrong?"

"She went missing three years back. Just disappeared. No note, nothing. I came home one night and she was gone."

"That's terrible."

"It broke me up. There was no accounting for it. We were very happily married."

"Did you tell the police?"

"Yes, but they have hundreds of missing persons in their files. They got nowhere. I have to presume she's dead. Patty was happy with me. We had a beautiful home and more money than we could spend. I own two vineyards—big ones. We had grapes in California before silicone chips, you know."

She smiled, and as it seemed that he didn't want to speak any more about his wife she said, "People try to grow grapes in England, but you wouldn't think much of them. When I left London the temperature was in the low fifties, and that's our so-called summer."

"I'm not that interested in the weather. I just want to find the place where all the records of births, marriages, and deaths are stored, so I can find if I have any family left."

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Eva understood now. This was not just the trip to England to acquire a few generations of ancestors and a family coat-of-arms. Here was a desperately lonely man. He had lost his wife and abandoned hope of finding her. But he was still searching for someone he could call his own. "Would that be Somerset House?"

His question broke through her thoughts.

"Yes. That is to say, I think the records are kept now in a building in Kingsway, just a few minutes' walk from there. If you asked at Somerset House, they'd tell you."

"And is it easy to look someone up?"

"It should be, if you have names and dates."

"I figured I'd start with my grandfather. He was born in a village called Edgecombe in Dorset in 1868, and he had three older brothers. Their names were Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and I'm offering no prize for guessing what Grandfather was called. My pa was given the same name and so was I. Each of us was an only child. I'd like to find out if any of Grandfather's brothers got married and had families. If they did, it's possible that I have some second cousins alive somewhere. Do you think I could get that information?"

"Well, it should all be there somewhere," said Eva.

"Does it take long?"

"That's up to you. You have to find the names in the index first. That can take some time, depending how common the name is. Unfortunately, they're not computerized. You just have to work through the lists."

"You're serious?"

"Absolutely. There are hundreds of enormous bound books full of names."

For the first time in the flight, his brow creased into a frown.

"Is something wrong?" asked Eva.

"Just that my name happens to be Smith."

Janet thought it was hilarious when Eva told her. "All those Smiths! How long has he got, for heaven's sake?"

"Here in England? Three weeks, I think."

"He could spend the whole time working through the index and still get nowhere. Darling, have you ever been there? The scale of the thing beggars description. I bet he gives up on the first day."

"Oh, I don't think he will. This is very important to him."

"Whatever for? Does he hope to get a title out of it? Lord Smith of San Francisco?"

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"I told you. He's alone in the world. His wife disappeared. And he has a weak heart. He expects to die soon."

"Probably when he tries to lift one of those index volumes off the shelf," said Janet. "He must be out of his mind." She could never fathom why other people didn't conform to her ideas of the way life should be conducted.

"He's no fool," said Eva. "He owns two vineyards, and in California that's big business."

"A rich man?" There was a note of respect in Janet's voice.

"Very."

"That begins to make sense. He wants his fortune to stay in the family—if he has one."

"He didn't say that, exactly."

"Darling, it's obvious. He's over here to find his people and see if he likes them enough to make them his beneficiaries." Her lower lip pouted in a way that was meant to be amusing, but might have been involuntary.

"Two vineyards in California! Someone stands to inherit all that and doesn't know a thing about it!"

"If he finds them," said Eva. "From what you say, the chance is quite remote."

"Just about impossible, the way he's going about it. You say he's starting with the grandfather and his three brothers, and hoping to draw up a family tree. It sounds beautiful in theory, but it's a lost cause. I happen to know a little about this sort of thing. When I was at Oxford I got involved in organizing an exhibition to commemorate Thomas Hughes—*Tom Brown's Schooldays*, right? I volunteered to try to find his descendants, just to see if they had any unpublished correspondence or photographs in the family. It seemed a marvellous idea at the time, but it was hopeless. I did the General Register Office bit, just like your American, and discovered you simply cannot trace people that way. You can work backwards if you know the names and ages of the present generation, but it's practically impossible to do it in reverse. That was with a name like Hughes. Imagine the problems with the name Smith!"

Eva could see Janet was right. She pictured John Smith III at his impossible task and was touched with pity. "There must be some other way he could do it."

Janet grinned. "Like working through the phonebook, ringing up all the Smiths?"

"I feel really bad about this. I encouraged him."

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"Darling, you couldn't have done anything else. If this was the guy's only reason for making the trip, you couldn't tell him to abandon it before the plane touched down at Heathrow. Who knows—he might have incredible luck and actually chance on the right name."

"That *would* be incredible."

Janet took a sip of the Californian wine Eva had brought back as Duty-Free. "Actually, there is another way."

"What's that?"

"Through parish records. He told you his grandfather was born somewhere in Dorset?"

"Edgecombe."

"And the four brothers were named after the gospel writers, so it's a good bet they were Church of England. Did all the brothers live in Edgecombe?"

"I think so."

"Then it's easy! Start with the baptisms. When was the grandfather born?"

"1868."

"Right. Look up the Edgecombe baptisms for 1868. There can't be so many John Smiths in a small Dorset village. You'll get the father's name in the register—he signs it, you see—and then you can start looking through other years for the brothers' entries. That's only the beginning. There are the marriage registers and the banns. If the Edgecombe register doesn't have them, they could be in an adjoining parish."

"Hold on, Janet. You're talking as if I'm going off to Dorset myself."

Janet's eyes shone. "Eva, you don't need to go there. The Society of Genealogists in Kensington has copies of thousands of parish registers. Anyone can go there and pay a fee for a few hours in the library. I've got the address somewhere." She got up and went to her bookshelf.

"Don't bother," said Eva. "It's John Smith who needs the information, not me, and I wouldn't know how to find him now. He didn't tell me where he's staying. Even if I knew, I'd feel embarrassed getting in contact again. It was just a conversation on a plane."

"Eva, I despair of you. When it comes to the point, you're so deplorably shy. I can tell you exactly where to find him: in the General Register Office in Kingsway, working through the Smiths. He'll be there for the next three weeks if someone doesn't help him out."

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"Meaning me?"

"No, I can see it's not your scene. Let's handle this another way. Tomorrow I'll take a long lunch break and pop along to the Society of Genealogists to see if they have a copy of the parish registers for Edgecombe. If they haven't, or there's no mention of the Smith family, we'll forget the whole thing."

"And if you *do* find something?"

"Then we'll consider what to do next." Casually, Janet added, "You know, I wouldn't mind telling him myself."

"But you don't know him."

"You could tell me what he looks like."

"How would you introduce yourself?"

"Eva, you're so stuffy! It's easy in a place like that where everyone is shoulder to shoulder at the indexes."

"You make it sound like a cocktail bar."

"Better."

Eva couldn't help smiling.

"Besides," said Janet. "I do have something in common with him. My mother's maiden name was Smith."

The search rooms of the General Register Office were filled with the steady sound of index volumes being lifted from the shelves, deposited on the reading tables, and then returned. There was an intense air of industry as the searchers worked up and down the columns of names, stopping only to note some discovery that usually was marked by a moment of reflection, followed by redoubled activity.

Janet had no trouble recognizing John Smith. He was where she expected to find him: at the indexes of births for 1868. He was the reader with one volume open in front of him that he had not exchanged in ten minutes. Probably not all morning. His stumpy right hand, wearing three gold rings, checked the rows of Victorian copperplate at a rate appropriate to a marathon effort. But when he turned a page he shook his head and sighed.

Eva had described him accurately enough without really conveying the total impression he made on Janet. Yes, he was short and slightly overweight and his hair was cut to within a half inch of his scalp, yet he had a teddy-bear quality that would definitely help Janet to be warm towards him. Her worry had been that he would be too pitiable.

She waited for the person next to him to return a volume, then

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moved to his side, put down the notebook she had brought, and asked him, "Would you be so kind as to keep my place while I look for a missing volume? I think someone must have put it back in the wrong place."

He looked up, quite startled to be addressed. "Why, sure."

Janet thanked him and walked round to the next row of shelves.

In a few minutes she was back. "I can't find it. I must have spent twenty minutes looking for it, and my lunch hour will be over soon."

He kept his finger against the place of birth he had reached and said, "Maybe I could help. Which one are you looking for, Miss?"

"Could you? It's P-to-S for the second quarter of 1868."

"*Really?* I happen to have it right here."

"Oh, I didn't realise—" Janet managed to blush a little.

"Please." He slid the book in front of her. "Go ahead—I have all day for this. Your time is more valuable than mine."

"Well, thank you." She turned a couple of pages. "Oh dear, this is going to be much more difficult than I imagined. Why did my mother have to be born with a name as common as Smith?"

"Your name is Smith?" He beamed at the discovery, then nodded. "I guess it's not such a coincidence."

"My mother's name actually. I'm Janet Murdoch."

"John Smith." He held out his hand. "I'm a stranger here myself, but if I can help in any way—"

Janet said, "I'm interested in tracing my ancestors, but looking at this I think I'd better give up. My great-grandfather's name was Matthew Smith, and there are pages and pages of them. I'm not even sure of the year he was born. It was either 1868 or 1869."

"Do you know the place he was born?"

"Somewhere in Dorset. Wait, I've got it written here." She opened the notebook to the page where she had made her notes at the Society of Genealogists. "Edgecombe."

"May I see that?" John Smith held it and his hand shook. "Janet, I'm going to tell you something that you'll find hard to believe."

He took her to lunch at the Wig and Pen. It tested her nerve as he questioned her about Matthew Smith of Edgecombe, but she was well prepared. She said she knew there had been four brothers, but she was deliberately vague about their names. Two, she said, had married, and she was the solitary survivor of Matthew's line.

John Smith ate very little lunch. Most of the time, he sat staring at Janet and grinning. He was very like a teddy bear. She found it

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pleasing at first, because it seemed to show he was a little lightheaded at the surprise she had served him but as the meal went on it made her feel slightly uneasy, as if he had something in mind that she hadn't foreseen.

"I have an idea," he said just before they got up to leave, "only I hope you won't get me wrong, Janet. What I would like is to go out to Dorset at the weekend and find Edgecombe, and have you come with me. Maybe we could locate the church and see if they still have a record of our people. *Would* you come with me?"

It suited her perfectly. The parish registers would confirm everything she had copied at the Society of Genealogists. Any doubts John Smith might have of her integrity would be removed. And if her information on the Smiths of Edgecombe was shown to be correct, no suspicion need arise that she was not related to them at all. John Smith would accept her as his sole surviving relative. He would return to California in three weeks with his quest accomplished. And sooner or later Janet would inherit two vineyards and a fortune.

"It's a wonderful idea!" she said. "I'll be delighted to come."

Nearly a fortnight passed before Eva started to be anxious about Janet's absence. Once or twice before she had gone away on assignments for the newspaper without saying she was going. Eva suspected she did it to make her work seem more glamorous—the sudden flight to an undisclosed destination on a mission so delicate it could not be whispered to a friend—but this time the *Sunday Telegraph* called to ask why Janet had not been seen at the office for over a week.

When they called again a day or two later, and Eva still had no news, she decided she had no choice but to make a search of Janet's room for some clue as to her whereabouts. At least she'd see which clothes Janet had taken—whether she had packed for a fortnight's absence. With luck she might find a note of the flight number.

The room was in its usual disorder, as if Janet had just gone for a shower and would sweep in at any moment in her white Dior bathrobe. By the phone, Eva found the calendar Janet used to jot down appointments. There was no entry for the last fortnight. On the dressing-table was her passport. The suitcase she always took on trips of a week or more was still on top of the wardrobe.

Janet was not the sort of person you worried over, but this was becoming a worry. Eva systematically searched the room and found no clue. She phoned the *Sunday Telegraph* and told them she was

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sorry she couldn't help. As she put down the phone, her attention was taken by the letters beside it. She had put them there herself, the dozen or so items of mail that had arrived for Janet.

Opening someone else's private correspondence was a step on from searching their room, and she hesitated. What right had she to do such a thing? She could tell by the envelopes that two were from the Inland Revenue and she put them back by the phone. Then she noticed one addressed by hand. It was postmarked Edgecombe, Dorset.

Her meeting with the friendly Californian named John Smith had been pushed to the edge of her memory by more immediate matters, and it took a few moments' thought to recall the significance of Edgecombe. Even then, she was baffled. Janet had told her that Edgecombe was a dead end. She had checked it at the Society of Genealogists. It had no parish register because there was no church there. They had agreed to drop their plan to help John Smith trace his ancestors.

But why should Janet receive a letter from Edgecombe?

Eva decided to open it.

The address on the headed notepaper was The Vicarage, Edgecombe, Dorset.

Dear Miss Murdoch,

I must apologise for the delay in replying to your letter. I fear that this may arrive after you have left for Dorset. However, it is only to confirm that I shall be pleased to show you the entries in our register pertaining to your family, although I doubt if we have anything you have not seen at the Society of Genealogists.

Yours sincerely,
Denis Harcourt, Vicar

A dead end? No church in Edgecombe?

Eva decided to go there herself.

The Vicar of Edgecombe had no difficulty in remembering Janet's visit. "Yes, Miss Murdoch called on a Saturday afternoon. At the time I was conducting a baptism, but they waited until it was over and I took them to the vicarage for a cup of tea."

"She had someone with her?"

"Her cousin."

"Cousin?"

"Well, I gather he was not a first cousin, but they were related in some way. He was from America, and his name was John Smith.

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He was very appreciative of everything I showed him. You see, his father and his grandfather were born here, so I was able to look up their baptisms and their marriages in the register. It goes back to the sixteenth century. We're very proud of our register."

"I'm sure you must be. Tell me, did Janet—Miss Murdoch—claim to be related to the Smiths of Edgecombe?"

"Certainly. Her great-grandfather, Matthew Smith, is buried in the churchyard. He was the brother of the American gentleman's grandfather, if I have it right."

Eva felt the anger like a kick in the stomach. Not only had Janet Murdoch deceived her, she had committed an appalling fraud on a sweet-natured man. And Eva herself had passed on the information that enabled her to do it. She would never forgive her for this.

"That's the only Smith grave we have in the churchyard," the Vicar continued. "When I first got Miss Murdoch's letter, I had hopes of locating the stones of the two John Smiths, the father and grandfather of our American visitor, but it was not to be. They were buried elsewhere."

Something in the Vicar's tone made Eva ask, "Do you know where they were buried?"

"Yes indeed. I got it from Mr. Harper, the sexton. He's been here much longer than I."

There was a pause.

"Is it confidential?" Eva asked.

"Not really." The Vicar eased a finger round his collar, as if it were uncomfortable. "It was information that I decided in the circumstances not to volunteer to Miss Murdoch and Mr. Smith. You are not one of the family yourself?"

"Absolutely not."

"Then I might as well tell you. It appears that the first John Smith developed some form of insanity. He was given to fits of violence and became quite dangerous. He was committed to a private asylum in London and died there a year or two later. His only son, the second John Smith, also ended his life in distressing circumstances. He was convicted of murdering two local girls by strangulation, and there was believed to have been a third, but the charge was never brought. He was found guilty but insane and sent to Broadmoor. To compound the tragedy, he had a wife and baby son. They went to America after the trial." The Vicar gave a shrug. "Who knows whether the child was ever told the truth about his father—or his grandfather, for that matter? Perhaps you can understand why I

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was silent on the matter when Mr. Smith and Miss Murdoch were here. I may be old-fashioned, but I think the psychiatrists make too much of heredity, don't you? If you took it seriously, you'd think no woman was safe with Mr. Smith."

From the vicarage, Eva went straight to the house of the Edgecombe police constable and told her story.

The officer listened patiently. When Eva had finished, he said, "Right, Miss. I'll certainly look into it. Just for the record, this American—what did he say his name was?"

DETECTIVERSE

A READER'S PLEA

by YURI PRIZEL

I would like to see a story with a new and daring touch
Where the butler and the squire hate each other very much;
And one of them is murdered while he's sleeping in his bed—
But the squire is the culprit, and the butler's lying dead.

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a ***NEW*** **detective story by**

PATRICIA McGERR

Selena Pierce (née Mead), wife of the head of Section Q, could examine the most meagre of evidence and come up with a startling inspiration—well, more accurately, a deductive hunch. And a Selena hunch could mean the difference between life and death . . .

STATE VISIT

by PATRICIA McGERR

Hugh Pierce answered the bedside phone on the first ring, so quickly that Selena was only half awakened. With Section Q's agents in parts of the world where day began in the middle of Washington's night, pre-dawn calls did not signal for her, as in more conventional households, a major emergency. She merely stirred a little and was almost asleep again when an urgency in her husband's low-voiced responses brought her fully awake and the name Lokarno captured her attention. If there was trouble, danger even as Hugh's tone implied, and it had to do with President Lokarno, that could be serious indeed.

Head of an oil-rich Middle Eastern country, Lokarno was coming to Washington on a state visit. He was due to land at Andrews Air Force Base in—she glanced at the luminous dial of her watch—less than six hours. A hero of his country's war for independence, Lokarno was loved by his own people, influential with his Arab neighbors, and a staunch friend of the United States. So no effort had been spared to insure the success of his visit, which was to begin with a ride past cheering crowds on Pennsylvania Avenue and end with a White House dinner and reception.

Hugh put down the phone, got out of bed, and, moving carefully in order not to disturb her, began to dress in the dark.

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"There's trouble?" She reached out to switch on the lamp. "Has something happened to Lokarno?"

"Not yet. Not ever if we can prevent it. That call was to tell me about a plot to kill him."

"Oh." As he disappeared into the bathroom she adjusted the pillow to raise herself to a sitting position and considered the significance of his words. No one in power, no matter how popular, is without enemies. Lokarno's death would not only throw his own country into turmoil but undermine the stability of the entire region. And if the attack came while he was in America, that would gravely damage the alliance with the West. There must be many who could profit from that, both in his country and outside it. That he might be a target for assassination should have been anticipated. She voiced the thought when Hugh returned.

"Yes, of course," he agreed. "The possibility has been up front since the visit was announced. The Secret Service, F.B.I., and District police are working closely with his own security forces to guarantee his safety."

"Then why are you rushing out in the middle of the night? Protecting foreign dignitaries isn't a job for Section Q."

"True. But it has just been dropped on our plate. By accident. A man our people have been questioning as part of another investigation decided to try to buy his way out with information. He has links with left-wing terrorist groups overseas and he heard on the grapevine about something called Operation Incognito. He says there's been a big payment to a man known as The Eraser to shoot Lokarno while he's here. So what was only a general threat has become a definite danger."

"What can you do to stop it?"

"Not much," he admitted, "unless we get more facts. The informant claims he's told us everything he knows. If that's true, I might as well stay in bed."

"But you wouldn't sleep."

"Right, so I'm better off down there pushing for answers. I've heard of The Eraser. The name has surfaced in connection with a number of high-ranking murders, but nobody's ever been able to get a description."

"Who hired him?" Selena asked. "Do you know that?"

"We can make an educated guess. The man with the most to gain is Vice President Saltor. He has some unsavory associates with ties to the same groups as our current source."

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"But he was Lokarno's choice," she protested. "And he's coming with him to Washington. I thought they were old and close friends."

"Battlefield buddies," he explained. "They were together in the revolution, but since the election Saltor has moved farther and farther to the left. Lokarno's death would make him head man and that can put a heavy strain on friendship. He can also count on strong support from Moscow."

"Does Lokarno suspect him?"

"That's a big part of the problem. People who try to warn him are shut up fast. He refuses to believe that the man who was at his side through the long fight for freedom could ever plot against him."

He moved to the bureau to gather keys, wallet, and coins. Beside them lay a copy of yesterday evening's *Star*. He picked it up and passed it to Selena. A front-page box carried the schedule for Lokarno's visit. She scanned it, saying, "He has a busy day."

"Too busy," Hugh said grimly. "And too many points of high exposure. The boys at State tried to talk him out of that ride up Pennsylvania Avenue, or at least persuade him not to use an open car. But this is a general who led his troops in the front lines and never ducked the heaviest fire. He insists that it's no use for a man to be brave in war if he's a coward in peace. So all they can do is search the rooftops and keep a close watch on the crowd. He'll be out in the open again for the wreath-laying at Arlington and at his Embassy's garden party. The security people could do a much better job if they were able to concentrate on one of these events instead of having to spread protection over all three. It would also help if we knew more about The Eraser."

"Your source referred to it as Operation Incognito," she reminded him. "There's usually a reason for choosing a code name, some way that it ties in with the action."

"The Eraser is incognito all right. We don't even know his nationality, much less his name." He went into the closet to get a jacket. When he came out he was frowning at a new train of thought. "If it means more than that, if it's a way of saying that he'll use a false identity, it may be a mistake to check only the outdoor events. They'd better look very closely at the guest lists for both the Embassy and the White House to make sure nobody slips through under an assumed name. If we'd had this information a week ago—but with only a few hours to work!" He zipped up his jacket, leaned over to kiss her. "Wish me luck."

He left the bedroom and started down the stairs. Selena's eyes

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went back to the newspaper to study, one by one, each item on the printed schedule. Suddenly she dropped the paper and sprang out of bed to run after her husband.

"Hugh!" He had reached the lower entrance hall and was about to open the door when she called down to him. "I've a suggestion! If they don't find The Eraser, try to get Lokarno to ask his Vice President to lay the wreath in his place!"

"You think the cemetery is where it's due to happen?"

"I'm sure of it."

"But why? Never mind." He cut himself short. "I've learned to trust your hunches. There'll be time later for explanations."

Selena too had a busy day, with two interviews for a magazine article in the morning and a third over lunch. Between appointments she listened to her car radio and learned that so far President Lokarno's visit had gone according to schedule with no surprises. She was on her way home to put her notes in order when, on a sudden impulse, she turned south to drive across Memorial Bridge and enter Arlington Cemetery. It was almost time for the wreath-laying ceremony.

Her press pass got her into the roped-off area on the east plaza of the Memorial Amphitheatre. Lokarno and his party were already inside, being welcomed by the commanding general. Plaza and steps were lined with members of the 3rd Infantry, who held rifles with fixed bayonets at their sides. Looking toward the white marble Tomb, she felt, as always, a stirring of emotion at its simple inscription: *Here rests in honored glory an American soldier known but to God.*

"I thought I'd find you here." A voice spoke softly in her ear. She turned to see Hugh close behind her.

"Is everything all right?"

"Your tip paid off." He drew her aside, out of earshot of the other spectators. "We put everybody connected with Arlington under a microscope and caught The Eraser. He had kidnaped one of the infantrymen and took his uniform and credentials. It was perfect cover since it got him on the site with a gun. A lot of governments are going to be relieved to know that he's out of action."

"What about Saltor?" she asked. "Stopping one killer won't do much good if the man responsible can go home and hire another killer."

"Lokarno has been told of the plot, but he won't believe in his

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friend's guilt without solid proof. That's still lacking. However, he did agree to put it to the test. No one else in his group knows that the gunman is in custody. Following your suggestion, Lokarno will say he's tired and ask Saltor to take the wreath to the Tomb. If he refuses, it will mean just one thing—that he thinks The Eraser is waiting to put a bullet in his brain."

While they talked there was movement on the plaza. Color bearers from the five services—Army, Navy, Marines, Coast Guard, and Air Force—carried their flags into position near the Tomb. The Marine Band began to play Lokarno's national anthem. All eyes were fixed on the Amphitheater entrance.

"The moment of truth," Hugh murmured. "Who will come out? The gentleman, or the tiger?"

An aide brought out a wreath of red and white carnations. He was followed closely by a stocky man in a uniform decorated with many medals. As he placed his hand on the opposite side of the wreath, Seiena strained to see the face under the visored cap.

"Is it Saltor?" she asked. "Or Lokarno?"

"I'm not sure," Hugh replied. "They're nearly the same size and both are in uniform. But I think—yes, there are only three stars. It's Saltor."

"Then he's innocent?"

"More likely he was afraid to give himself away by saying no to the President. He may be gambling on the gunman guessing it's the wrong man. Which would be a bad risk for Saltor if The Eraser were still in place."

Together Saltor and the aide started toward the Tomb. At the order "Present arms," the infantrymen raised their rifles with chorus-line precision. The movement brought Saltor to a dead stop. He looked wildly around, let go of the wreath, and scuttled back to the shelter of the doorway.

"Lost his nerve," Hugh whispered. "That's as good as a confession."

For an instant the carnations dipped toward the ground but they were saved by the firm grip of the aide. He stood, unmoving and expressionless, while another uniformed man came from the Amphitheater to take Saltor's place. The move was accomplished with such speed and smoothness that most of the spectators were unaware of the change.

Walking slowly, the two men approached the Tomb. The aide moved aside and Lokarno placed the wreath on the metal stand that

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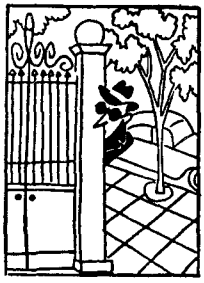
stood ready to receive it. He stepped back, bowed deeply, and there was a minute of reverent silence. Then the bugler raised his instrument to his lips to end the ceremony with the melancholy strains of "Taps."

"Now you can tell me," Hugh said as they walked down the hill to her car. "Why were you so sure that this was the place?"

"Incognito," she answered, "is Italian for unknown. So Operation Incognito described just one spot on President Lokarno's schedule—the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier."



NEXT MONTH . . .

15 ***NEW*** stories—including

JULIAN SYMONS (about the logical man)

STEPHEN KING (about a wedding reception)

EDWARD D. HOCH (about Nick Velvet)

LILLIAN de la TORRE (about Dr. Sam: Johnson)

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a *NEW* Rand story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

The daughter of one of Rand's old enemies lures Rand out of retirement with a preposterous story about a peripatetic snowman. The former Double-C man has his doubts, but once a counter-espionage agent always a careful, cautious operator. Spies check out even the most far-fetched suspicions—their lives depend on it . . .

THE SPY AND THE SNOWMAN

by EDWARD D. HOCH

Hilda Nelson was a tweedy young woman who might have been pretty if she wore her hair differently and chose glasses more suited to the shape of her face. As it was, she was the sort men passed on the street every day without noticing, the sort one would have a hard time describing at a later date. When Rand met her in the lobby of London's Dorchester Hotel, his first thought was to wonder if this appearance was deliberate on her part. After all, her father had been a spy.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Rand." She smiled and extended a delicate hand. "So good of you to come."

"I'm surprised you remembered me," he said with a smile. "You must have been all of nine years old the last time I saw you."

"I'm twenty-two now," she told him, making an announcement of the fact.

Rand glanced beyond her shoulder and saw the waiters serving tea and sandwiches in the inner lobby. "Let's go in there," he suggested. "It looks comfortable."

When they'd removed their coats and settled onto the nearest sofa, Hilda Nelson said, "I'm really most appreciative of your coming

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into London to meet me in such terrible weather."

"It's been a bad winter," he agreed, "but a little snow doesn't bother me." In truth it was the snowiest January in many years, blanketing much of England with depths of over a foot. In a country where the winter weather was more likely to consist of rain and fog, the change was a bit startling.

"I telephoned you, Mr. Rand, because there's something strange going on which I think you ought to know about. It could be a national-security problem."

"I'm retired from Concealed Communications, you know. Have been for several years."

"I know. But I have to tell someone. Father always had a liking for you."

That information came as a surprise to Rand. Colonel Nelson had left British Intelligence in disgrace, much to Rand's satisfaction, and become involved with Russian agents in Rome. Two years ago, when Rand attempted to establish contact with him in a Russian amusement park, he'd been murdered before Rand's eyes. "I was there when your father died, you know," he said quietly.

"I know. Hastings was kind enough to tell me all about it."

"In a way I might have contributed to his death."

"But you also brought his killer to justice." Her face seemed to soften a bit. "I hold no grudge against you, Mr. Rand. My father left mother and me some years ago. I can barely remember him now."

"How is your mother?"

"She died too, this past summer."

"I'm sorry."

"Anyway, I have a place of my own now—a very comfortable gardener's house on the old Swindon estate."

"Swindon! Isn't that where the NATO foreign ministers' conference is being held this week?"

"Exactly. The government wanted a secure location away from London, so they leased the estate. It's quite well guarded already, and they don't arrive for the conference till tomorrow. My little house is just outside the gates, so I'm not affected directly."

"Do you work there?"

"In the nearby town. I help out at the library. But I never quite finished my studies and I'm planning to return to Reading for my final year."

"A good University. My wife teaches there."

"Hastings told me you were married. He said your wife actually

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went to Moscow to help you at the time my father was killed."

"Yes. It was a sticky few days. But tell me about your problem."

"From my bedroom window I can see over the wall to the grounds of the estate. The night before last, as I was preparing for bed, I happened to look out the window and the moon was full. I could see the grounds quite clearly and I observed that someone had built a snowman about a hundred yards from the main house."

"Are there children on the grounds?"

"Not that I'm aware of. There's a caretaker, but the government moved its own team in to prepare for the NATO meeting."

"Please go on."

"There's very little more to tell. When I awakened yesterday morning and looked out, the snowman was gone."

"Melted?"

"The temperature hovered around freezing all night. There was certainly no thaw."

"Interesting," Rand agreed.

"Mr. Rand, the same thing happened again last night!"

"The snowman?"

"Yes."

"And it was gone this morning?"

"Yes."

"Why didn't you report it to the authorities?"

"I suppose because they'd laugh at me. But I felt I should tell someone."

"As I said, I'm retired."

"But couldn't you come out to Swindon with me? If the snowman appears again tonight you'd know what to do."

He thought about that. "I'm afraid it's impossible for tonight. But I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll drive out to see you first thing in the morning. Keep an eye out tonight and let me know if anything unusual happens."

"Thank you, Mr. Rand."

"Now relax and let's have some tea."

He chatted with her a bit longer and then left her to catch the late afternoon train home. His wife Leila was waiting for him at the station.

He trudged across the snow-covered parking lot and climbed into the car, giving her a kiss.

"How was your meeting with Colonel Nelson's daughter?" she asked as she started the motor.

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"Odd. She wants me to come out there. Something about a snowman spying on the NATO conference."

"Are you serious?"

"I am. I don't know about her."

"What do you mean?" Leila asked.

"Damn it, do you suppose she really does blame me for her father's disgrace and death? Do you suppose she'd try to lure me into a trap of some sort with a wild story she knew would intrigue me?"

Leila couldn't answer that. And neither could Rand.

In the morning, before he left home, Rand phoned Hastings at the unlisted office number. The duty officer came on to inform him that Hastings hadn't yet come in, but Rand knew better. He'd worked with Hastings long enough to know every quirk of his former superior's routine. "It's after eight. If he's not in his office on something urgent, he's in the canteen having coffee. Get him, will you? Tell him it's Rand."

He waited five minutes before the familiar voice came on the line. "My God, Rand, have the Russians invaded us? What prompts a call from you?"

"Remember Colonel Nelson's daughter?"

"Vaguely. Gilda? Hilda?"

"Hilda. She's living at the former gardener's cottage just outside the walls of the Swindon estate, where the NATO conference starts tonight. Know anything about the security setup there?"

"We have a man named Hartz on the scene handling security. The conference was planned for London but they decided last month to move it because an isolated country estate is less vulnerable to electronic eavesdropping. You know, Rand, they have a device now whereby a laser beam aimed at a window from outside can pick up the vibrations caused by voices inside the room. Some offices in Washington are actually equipped with speakers over the windows to curtain them with the sound of rock music and prevent this sort of eavesdropping."

"We live in a marvelous age," Rand agreed. "You think the Russians are after something at the conference?"

"With the world situation what it is, I imagine they're after whatever they can get. Do you think Nelson's daughter could be involved with them?"

"I can't be sure. I'm going out there this morning."

"We can't give you any special clearance, Rand."

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"I know. I'm retired. On the shelf, except when I can be useful to you."

Hastings may have detected a note of bitterness. "What does Hilda Nelson mean to you, Rand?"

"Not a thing. Last time I saw her she was nine years old."

"You can't blame yourself for her father's death."

"I don't. The way he died was brought on by the way he'd lived. But his daughter came to me for help, and I'm not sure exactly what sort of help she needs. She's seen some odd things around the estate, or claims she has, anyway."

"You say you're going over there today?"

"Yes."

"Keep me informed, will you? If you run onto anything we should know about—"

"Don't worry, I'll let you know."

Rand said goodbye to Leila as she was leaving for her classes, and then headed the car west toward the Swindon estate. It was just under an hour's drive from his house, along country roads made narrow by the unusual snowfall. As he approached the estate, a uniformed constable appeared in the road to stop his car.

"Can't go through here, sir. You'll have to turn back and detour through the town."

"I'm calling on Miss Hilda Nelson. I believe she lives in that cottage outside the gate."

"What would your name be, sir?"

"Jeffery Rand."

"Oh, yes, Mr. Rand. Miss Nelson told us you'd be coming. Drive right on through."

Rand thanked the constable and went on to the cottage, pulling the car off the road into alarmingly deep snow. Hilda must have seen his arrival, for she was waiting by the open front door as he approached. "Come in, Mr. Rand. I'm so glad you could make it."

He entered the small cottage, and was surprised to encounter a slim young man wearing a turtleneck sweater and a leather jacket. He got to his feet and offered a hand. "Mr. Rand, I'm Charlie Fanet, a friend of Hilda's. Nice to meet you."

"Charlie came here last month to do some research for a paper on British archeological sites, but the snow has put a chill on his studies." Hilda opened two beers and held one out to Rand. She gave the other to Charlie and got one more for herself. "This place certainly is a hive of activity with the conference starting today."

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"They stopped me on the road," Rand said, feeling uneasy at the presence of Fanet.

"Mr. Rand used to work with my father," Hilda explained to the young man. "They were boring civil servants together."

Fanet sipped his beer. "Were you in the foreign office too?"

"I traveled a great deal," Rand answered vaguely.

"Well, I really should be on my way, Hilda. The snowfall hasn't affected the libraries and I have a great deal of bookwork to catch up on."

"Will I see you for dinner?"

"Of course," he said with a smile. "I've heard there's a charming little inn over near Wantage. And not too expensive either. I'll pick you up at seven."

"Fine." She walked him to the door and Rand watched them exchange brief goodbye kisses.

When Hilda returned she was all business. "Sorry about that. I didn't know he'd come by this morning."

"Seems like a nice young chap," Rand remarked. "Is it serious?"

She shrugged. "I've only known him since Christmas. I may have mentioned I have a part-time job at the local library. That's where we met."

"What about the snowman? Did you see it again last night?"

"No, but it was overcast and there was no moonlight. It might have been there in the shadows."

"Could we see the area from this window?"

"The upstairs bedroom is better. Follow me."

The cottage was small, with only a single bedroom upstairs under the eaves. From its window Rand could see over the wall to the grounds of the estate. It was about 200 yards to the mansion itself and the week-old snow was crisscrossed by trails of footprints in every direction. "The snowman was about halfway up," Hilda said. "Not far from that big chestnut tree."

Rand raised the window and leaned out as far as he could. "I wish I could see the area just inside the wall."

"Why is that?"

"You can see from the lines of footprints that the grounds are patrolled. A snowman that appeared and disappeared would be far too noticeable. But one that was there all the time, and only moved a bit at night, might escape detection."

"Then you agree with my thinking that there has to be someone inside the snowman?"

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"It's certainly possible," he admitted.

"But why? What could they hope to see that they can't see from here?"

Rand looked at her oddly. There was something about her remark— "It may not be a matter of seeing, but of hearing. There are certain types of listening devices which can be implanted in walls and actually transmit sounds for short distances. No wires are necessary. But the walls of that old place are quite thick, I imagine. That would cut down considerably on the range of the transmitter."

"So someone hidden in the snowman could move close enough to pick up the signals on a radio receiver."

"Exactly." Rand closed the window. "But this is pure speculation. I haven't even seen the snowman yet."

"The conference doesn't start till tonight. Why would the snowman have appeared so early?"

"Testing the equipment, of course. And picking up information on the arrival of the delegates."

"What are you going to do now?" she asked as Rand reached for his coat.

"Take a look through that gate and see if I can spot our snowman."

Hilda waited in the cottage while he strolled down to the gate where another constable stood guard.

"Not allowed in here, sir," the man told him. "The grounds are closed by government order."

"I know. The NATO conference. Has everyone been moved or is the caretaker's family still on the grounds?"

"I couldn't say, sir."

"If the children are here they'd have built a snowman in this weather."

"Well, I did notice a snowman down along the far wall, but I haven't seen any children about."

Rand thanked the constable and went back to the cottage where Hilda Nelson was waiting. He saw the question in her eyes and answered it before she asked. "Your snowman is there, all right."

"I wasn't sure you believed me."

"I wasn't sure I did either."

"What will you do now?"

"I need to get onto the grounds, and for that I must call Hastings in London."

He dialed the special number and identified himself. "Yes, Rand," Hastings said. "What is it?"

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"I want you to arrange my admission to the Swindon estate."

"That would be difficult. The foreign ministers are arriving already."

"There could be a serious security leak."

Hastings hesitated. "How much time do you have?"

"I want to be in there by nightfall."

"I'll drive out myself."

"You don't need to—"

"I'd better come. This NATO meeting is an extremely delicate affair."

"Very well." Rand gave directions to Hilda's house.

When he'd hung up she asked, "Is Hastings coming?"

"Yes."

"You'll want something to eat, while you're waiting."

Cars were arriving in a steady stream now—big black limousines from London that pulled up to the gate before being admitted to the estate. Hilda watched them in fascination as the afternoon passed, talking all the while to Rand about growing up and the memory of her father.

"He was a bad man, wasn't he?" she asked at one point.

"Who am I to judge?"

"I think even when I was very young I knew that he was bad. And after he left British Intelligence to live in Rome I knew something terrible had happened to his life. Mother never spoke much about it, but I remember once when I was old enough to realize she was going out for the evening with a man who wasn't my father, she said to me, 'He's kind and gentle and open. When he says something I can believe it. With your father I was never sure. Whatever you do, Hilda, never fall in love with a spy. Deception seems to come too easy to them.' "

Rand thought of Leila, and wondered if he could ever consciously deceive her. "Generalizations like that are usually wrong," he observed. "Still, it's not a good life for a family man. I retired from Concealed Communications when I married."

Hastings came in the late afternoon, when the slim traces of winter sun had already given way to darkness. Activity at the estate had stepped up as the last of the foreign ministers arrived for a dinner that evening which would open three days of talks. Hilda Nelson greeted Hastings a bit coolly, and Rand could see he was uncomfortable in her presence.

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"We'd better be getting over there," he said, "and check out this idea of yours."

"It's Hilda's idea, really," Rand said.

Hastings regarded her uncertainly. "I'm sure you'll receive whatever credit is due, Miss."

They entered the gates of the estate in Hastings' car and drove up to the house itself. Now that the conference was about to begin the area close to the house itself was floodlit from the roof to prevent anyone from sneaking up unseen. Far out against the wall, just at the edge of the lighted area, Rand could see a chubby round snowman about six feet in height. "There it is," he said, and proceeded to tell Hastings what little he knew.

"You got me all the way out here because of a snowman that moves around at night? I don't think retirement has treated you too kindly, Rand."

"Radio transmitters implanted in the walls could carry as far as that snowman. Someone hidden inside could listen in and even record conversations."

"Far-fetched at best," Hastings decided. "What would happen if there was a thaw and the snow melted?"

"I assume the Russians can tune in the long-range forecasts as easily as we can. The below-freezing or near-freezing temperatures are supposed to hang on till the weekend."

A tall athletic-looking man approached the car and gave a sort of half-salute to Hastings. "The gate guard told me you were here, sir."

"Hello, Hartz. Rand, this is George Hartz, our chief of security for the NATO conference. I think he's new since your days."

"Is there some trouble?" Hartz asked.

"Have your people checked out that snowman down by the wall?"

Hartz looked startled. "Snowman? You want me to search him for weapons?"

"See what I mean, Rand?" Hastings said with a sigh. Then, to Hartz, "You could break it apart to make sure it's really all snow."

The tall man grunted. "I'd have no cause to do a thing like that. We get little enough snow in England. I say if someone builds a snowman let them enjoy it."

"That's right—you're the skier, aren't you? Skied in the Olympics, didn't you?"

Hartz drew himself up with a touch of pride. "Silver medal in the biathlon, sir."

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"Well, we don't need skiers here. We need snowman inspectors." He glanced sideways at Rand. "You want to walk down and take a look?"

Rand thought about it and knew the time had come to put his vague fear into words. "I think we'd better wait, Hastings."

"What for?"

"If Hilda Nelson is telling the truth that snowman will start to move sometime this evening. Possibly about the time dinner gets under way inside. When that happens, we'll know."

"*If* she's telling the truth? Why should she lie?"

"We have to consider the possibility she made up the whole story to lure me out here. And you too, perhaps. Don't you see, Hastings? She might hold us responsible for what happened to her father. What if we walked over to that snowman and started kicking it apart and the whole thing blew up in our faces?"

"Pleasant thought," Hastings remarked distastefully.

"Should I call the bomb squad?" George Hartz asked.

Rand waved away the suggestion. "No, no. I was just considering all the possibilities. Let's park around the back of the house, out of sight, and see what happens."

Hartz returned to his patrol duties and Hastings drove the car into the parking area, stopping next to a black Rolls-Royce. "Now what?" he asked.

"We wait," Rand said. "Do you have binoculars in the car?"

Hastings produced a pair from the glove compartment. Rand focused them and studied the snowman standing in the shadows near the wall of the estate. It was tall and quite bulky—easily large enough to contain a medium-sized man and a miniature radio receiver. For arms there was a broom handle stuck through it, just below the head, with an old glove on either end. Antenna wires could easily run along the broom handle too, Rand decided.

They'd been there about 30 minutes when Rand suddenly tensed. "Someone's coming over the wall," he said. "See there? Just above the snowman?"

Hastings took the binoculars. "You're right. Let's go get him."

"Hold on. I want to see exactly what he's up to."

The figure, dressed in white to blend with the snow, dropped to the ground behind the snowman and did not move for several minutes. Then suddenly the snowman seemed to rise up about two feet in the air. "He's lifting it!" Hastings said.

"And getting inside."

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The snowman settled back to the ground and remained motionless. Finally, after another five minutes of waiting, they detected some movement—ever so slight—toward the house.

"How far away would you say he is?" Rand asked.

"About a hundred yards and coming closer."

"Let's get him close enough so we can beat him to the wall if he tries to run for it," Rand suggested.

"Should I signal to Hartz?"

"Not yet. I think we can take him ourselves."

The snowman stopped moving, and they waited some more. Then it edged forward across the snow again, only to pause as one of Hartz's security men rounded the corner of the house. "Why doesn't he notice that it has moved?" Hastings wondered.

"It's still not that far from the wall, and there's no landmark except for the chestnut tree. Besides, people don't think about snowmen moving."

Once the guard was out of sight the snowman edged forward again. When it was almost to the tree, Rand said, "Let's go. That's where Hilda said she saw it and I don't think it'll come any closer."

It was still more than 60 yards from the house when Rand and Hastings broke into a trot, spreading out to approach the snowman from two directions. It came up a bit and wavered, as if the man inside had seen them and didn't know quite what to do. Then the snowman settled down and was still. By the time Rand reached it Hastings had his gun out. "Lift it up," he told Rand. "I'll cover you."

The snowman was cold to the touch, which surprised Rand. He'd expected it to be made of plastic or cotton, but on the outside at least it really was snow. It was very light, though, and couldn't have weighed more than ten or twelve pounds. As he raised it they saw the figure underneath, and Hastings warned, "Don't move! I have a gun!"

The man was kneeling inside the snowman, and now he toppled forward on his face, arms outstretched toward the wall as if in a final effort to escape. There was a bloody wound in the back of his neck and a blood-covered knife spotted the snow at his side.

"What—?" Hastings lowered his weapon in amazement. "What happened to him?"

Rand bent to feel for a pulse. "He's been stabbed. I think he's dead."

Hartz felt it was important to conduct the investigation as much

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as possible without disturbing the NATO foreign ministers who were just settling down to dinner inside the house. Hastings was quick to agree. "Let's wrap it up and tell them about it later. That all right, Rand?"

Rand grunted and peered again at the inside of the snowman. The body of a man he'd never seen before interested him not nearly as much as the equipment he'd brought with him. The snowman itself was a shaped mold of thin white plastic, already showing a few tears and holes, onto which had been packed a layer of snow. The broom handle that formed the arms passed through the inside, enabling the whole thing to be easily lifted and carried from within. There was no antenna as Rand had first suspected, but clipped to the dead man's belt had been a miniature radio receiver and tape recorder.

Rand switched it on now and heard the voices from within the house: *"Let me propose a toast to western unity,"* someone was saying. The reception was weak and crackly, but understandable. To test his theory Rand walked back toward the wall with the receiver. After a few yards the crackling overwhelmed the voice. He had to advance almost to the position of the body before the voice could be understood again.

"A wall mike," he told Hastings. "Not too powerful, which is probably why Hartz's electronic sweep of the house missed it. You might check to see if there's been any recent repair work in there—especially plastering of the walls."

"Where are you going?"

"Back to Hilda Nelson's place, to tell her what's happened."

"What *has* happened?" Hastings wanted to know. "You realize no one could have stabbed him. We were watching this snowman at all times. No one came anywhere near it."

"Doesn't seem like it," Rand admitted.

"And no one commits suicide by stabbing himself in the back of the neck."

"This one must have. There's no other explanation."

"I've got a call in for the local medical examiner. We'll see what he thinks."

Rand walked through the ring of security men and returned to his car. He drove the short distance to the cottage outside the walls and was met at the door by Hilda. "What's going on over there? I could see all the men standing around the snowman."

She had some logs burning in the little fireplace and Rand sat down to warm himself. "There was a spy in the snowman, as we

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suspected. The man apparently killed himself as Hastings and I tried to capture him."

"Apparently?"

"He's dead and there's no other explanation. He was recording conversations from the house. They must have a transmitter in the walls somewhere. Probably more than one, in fact."

Hilda tried to keep her voice casual. "Was the dead man anyone you knew?"

Rand studied her expression. "Never saw him before."

The bell sounded and she went to answer the door. Rand saw Charlie Fanet come in, shivering from the cold. "What's all the excitement at the estate?" he asked. "There are lights and men all over the place."

"Mr. Rand was just telling me about it. They caught a spy."

"I wouldn't say we caught him," Rand corrected. "He's dead."

"Dead?"

"Either suicide or a damned strange murder. We don't know which yet."

"Such excitement for this little town! Was he a Russian?"

"We don't know that either. Not yet."

"Can I get us a drink?" Hilda asked them.

"That would taste good," Fanet said. "It's really turning cold out there."

Rand excused himself to go upstairs and peer out the bedroom window once more. He could see that the body had been removed and the security guards were searching the area around the snowman for clues. He knew Hastings would arrive at the cottage shortly.

When he went back downstairs Fanet was standing with his arm around Hilda. He removed it when he heard Rand and said, "What's so almighty important about that NATO conference anyway?"

"The Russians have been acting up lately, as you must know. This conference is to plan certain countermoves by the western powers. Naturally anything the Russians can learn about what is discussed—"

His words were cut short by the bell again. This time it was Hastings, and he acknowledged Fanet with a brief handshake before turning to Rand. "We were lucky on identification. Found the dead man's car parked down the road. He's Gregor Pechora, an undersecretary at the Russian Embassy in London. We have a file on him."

Rand nodded. "What did the doctor say?"

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"Funny thing. The knife wound is crude and bloody, but not really deep enough to have caused death. They're doing an autopsy."

"Interesting."

"At least it solves part of the mystery for us. The wound could have been inflicted before he climbed over the wall and got inside the snowman."

Rand disagreed. "Not a chance, Hastings. I examined the snow. There wasn't a trace of blood anywhere except where we found the body. The knife wound was inflicted there."

"By an invisible man?"

"Even invisible men leave footprints. Remember that old movie? There were a great many prints in the snow, but none close enough to the scene—except the prints Gregor made as he moved the snowman along."

"Do you think he had a partner who killed him?" Hilda asked.

"That's exactly what we think," Hastings responded.

Rand was silent. When he finally spoke it was with a request for Hastings. "I'm going to stay here a while. Could you phone me as soon as you learn anything more from the doctor?"

"Of course. But what—?"

"Give me some time, Hastings," he said quietly. "I have to ask the right questions."

When Hastings had gone, young Charlie Fanet settled down as if he intended to stay the night. Rand got Hilda aside and suggested, "Send him out for beer or something. I want to talk with you privately."

She frowned, questioning his words, but said nothing. Instead she walked back to the fireplace where Fanet was relaxing and told him, "Run up to the store, Charlie, and get me some things, will you? A quart of milk and some beer?"

"We don't need beer."

"Mr. Rand would like some."

He shot a glance at Rand and stood up. "All right. I'll be back in a few minutes."

When they were alone, Rand turned to Hilda Nelson. "Why did you come to me with this? Why did you want me up here?"

"I—"

"My first thought was that it was some sort of trap, that you blamed me for what happened to your father."

"No, no!"

"But now I think it was something else. The NATO conference

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was only moved here last month, and something else happened at about the same time, didn't it? Charlie Fanet came here, supposedly on his archeology project. You told me he came around Christmas. And he came here, didn't he? It wasn't you that was important to him, but this house."

The strength seemed to go out of her and she stared at the fireplace. "It's what I've been afraid of," she admitted quietly.

"Because of your father?"

She nodded. "I lived with that deception all the while I was growing up. My mother lived with it too. Sometimes I think it helped to kill her. I don't think I could ever love a man like that."

"Do you love Charlie?"

"How can anyone be sure after a single month? He told me he loved me at first sight, but you see what I look like. How can I believe him?" Her voice was filled with desperation.

"Has he seemed suspicious?"

"You'll remember I said something earlier—about what a spy could hope to see from that snowman that he couldn't see from here. The same goes for listening. Maybe he wanted my house to pick up those radio transmissions. When he couldn't, he was forced to use the snowman."

"Try to calm down," Rand urged her. "You're not unattractive, Hilda, regardless of what you might think. A man doesn't have to be lying if he says he's in love with you."

The phone rang and she went to answer it. Then she held it out for Rand. Hastings was on the line. "The autopsy confirms that the knife wound didn't kill him. There were simply three or four gouges in the skin, not more than half an inch deep."

"If that didn't kill him, what did?"

"The doctor suspects a quick-acting poison. Some form of cyanide. He'll need more time for tests, but it looks as if we're back to the suicide theory. He swallowed a pill when he saw us coming."

"And then tried to stab himself too?" Rand wasn't buying it. "I think he was murdered, Hastings."

"Then tell me how."

"The Russians are experts when it comes to devious devices. Remember last year when a defector was killed by the injection of bacteria through an umbrella tip?"

"You're trying to tell me the snowman was poisoned?"

"No, this man Pechora was only killed when it became obvious we would capture him." He was thinking of the upstairs window

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again. "A tiny poisoned dart fired from a powerful air rifle could have—Of course, Hastings! That's it—a poisoned dart! Pechora felt it hit him in the back of the neck and he knew what it was! He was trying to dig it out with his knife, to cut away the skin as one does with a snakebite, when he died."

Hilda Nelson had come up beside him as he spoke. He glanced at her pale face as he heard Hastings protesting, "But we didn't find any dart."

"It was a tiny thing, and it fell in the snow after Pechora cut it out. It's probably still there somewhere. When I examined the inside of that snowman I noticed one or two holes in the plastic. And the thin layer of snow on the outside of the plastic wouldn't have stopped the dart."

"I'll have Hartz shovel up that snow and melt it down."

"Tell him to be careful. The dart will be sharp and still quite lethal."

He hung up as Hilda said, "You think it was fired from my window, don't you?"

He answered with a question of his own. "Was Fanet here at the time?"

"I don't know when the time was. He came about a half hour before you did." She turned suddenly, hearing a sound at the front door. "He's back!"

She ran toward the front door before Rand could stop her, and suddenly he remembered the body of the dead Russian as it sprawled in the snow at his feet. Lying on its face, arms outstretched toward the wall.

Face to the wall meant back of the neck toward the big house, away from Hilda's cottage. If it was a poisoned dart, it couldn't have been fired from the upstairs window.

"Hilda!"

She backed into the room and Rand saw the security chief, George Hartz, come through the door. Hartz was holding a revolver in his hand as if he intended to use it.

Rand stood perfectly still, then slowly raised his hands as Hartz motioned with the gun. "Of course," Rand said as if thinking aloud. "You would have had this cottage bugged too. Did we sound as if we were getting too close to the truth?"

Hartz raised the pistol an inch. "I'm sorry I have to do this," he said. "No one was meant to die."

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"Why would you kill us?" Hilda demanded. "I don't even know who you are!"

"Let me introduce you," Rand offered, allowing himself a slight smile. "This is George Hartz, in charge of security for the NATO conference next door. Of course the Russians needed an insider to plant the listening devices in the walls. Hartz was on duty and could hardly handle the listening-in chores, but he could manage to overlook a fake snowman on the grounds of the estate."

"Then it wasn't Charlie after all?"

Rand shook his head. "Fanet wouldn't have had access to the estate. And Fanet wouldn't have found it necessary to murder his accomplice to prevent his talking. After all, Fanet was a nobody. He could simply drop out of sight. But Hartz has a position to protect. He couldn't risk Pechora talking. It was worth a shot with an air rifle, sending a tiny poisoned dart into a snowman sixty yards away."

George Hartz smiled. "You'll admit it was a good shot."

"But not a difficult one for somebody who won the Olympic silver medal in the biathlon. That's a cross-country ski race with target shooting along the course. I believe the shooting is with a rifle at fifty meters—nearly as far as sixty yards."

"That's enough talk," Hartz said. "When you're both dead Fanet will be blamed for the whole thing."

"No, he won't," Rand insisted. "The Russian was shot in the back of the neck while facing away from the big house. Only someone up there could have killed him. Someone whose security position would allow him to keep an air rifle hidden in his car."

"No one will think of that. They don't all have your brains." The gun moved up an inch more just as the front door opened and Charlie Fanet returned with the groceries. Hartz started to run and Rand was on him in an instant.

It was over very quickly.

"I'm glad Charlie had his own key," Rand said from his position on top of Hartz. "Now you'd better telephone to Hastings."

Hilda blushed and looked at Charlie. "I had the most terrible suspicions about you."

"What sort of suspicions?" he asked, puzzled.

"She didn't believe in love at first sight," Rand told him, "until now."

He drove home that night feeling just a bit like Cupid.

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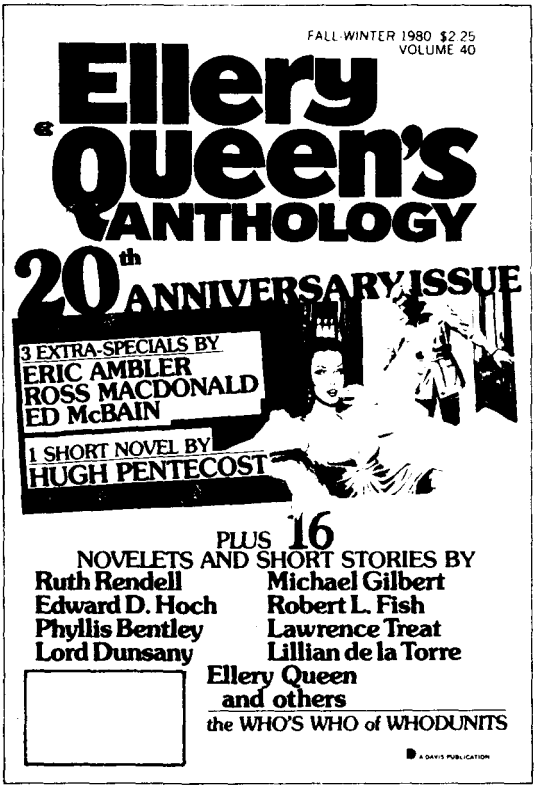

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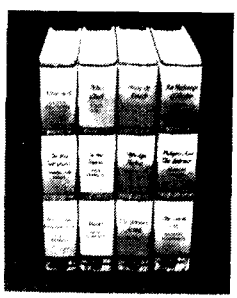

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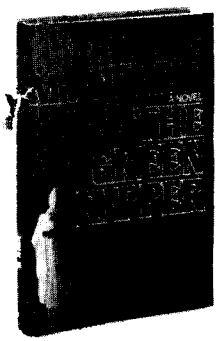

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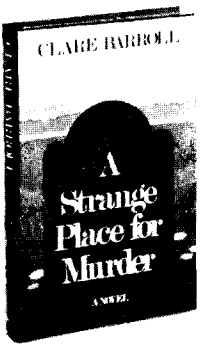

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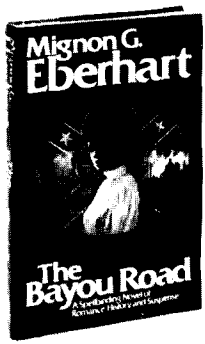

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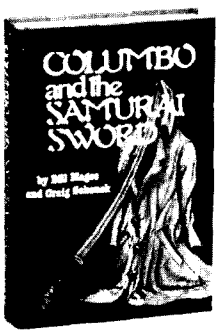

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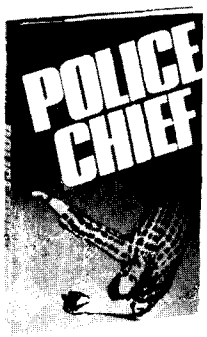

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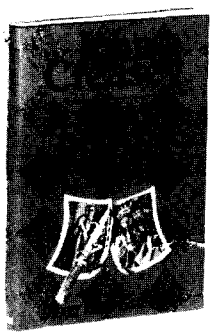

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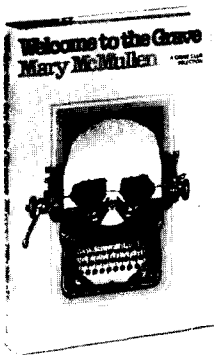

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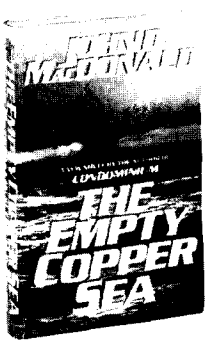

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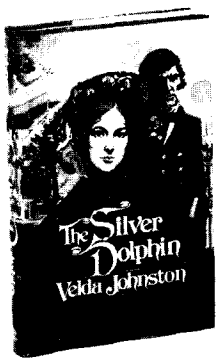

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